

## 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 10, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 11 to 21, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 22 to 29, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Rural Broadband Scheme**

30. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has satisfied himself that the broadband task force recently established by his Department will sufficiently identify gaps in the provision of rural broadband, particularly in areas in which only a small number of homes have not been connected by private providers; and the envisaged timeframe for identifying those anomalies and successfully providing high speed broadband to all of those homes. [41855/17]

33. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times he has met with the mobile broadband taskforce since June 2017. [41961/17]

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the terms of reference for the broadband task force recently established by his department; if there will be a published report; and the timeframe for such a report. [41854/17]

65. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the work of the mobile phone and broadband taskforce since the publication of their report in December 2016; the progress which has been made in the implementation of their recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41889/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos 30, 33, 48 and 65 together.

Recognising the frustration experienced across Ireland where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force.

I established the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce (the ‘Taskforce’) in July 2016, arising from that commitment, to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State

intervention.

The Taskforce which I co-chaired, consulted and engaged with telecoms industry representatives to identify short and medium term solutions to alleviate telecommunications deficits, particularly in rural Ireland. The Terms of Reference of the Taskforce is available on my Departments' website.

The Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders to publish a Final report in December 2016 which contains 40 actions to alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland. The Report is also available on my Department's website.

Key measures among the 40 actions contained in the Taskforce Report included measures to streamline and prioritise planning procedures for telecoms infrastructure, a licensing regime to allow people to boost their home signals using repeaters, the build out of new ducting along the M7 / M8, measures to help stakeholders make informed choices in relation to their network provider and handsets, and general network improvements.

To maintain momentum, I established an Implementation Group together to drive progress on implementing the measures recommended by the Taskforce. The establishment of the Implementation Group is a commitment in the Action Plan for Rural Development. I co-chair the Implementation Group with Minister of State Sean Kyne.

The Group comprises key stakeholders identified in the Taskforce report with responsibility for delivery of actions. Officials in both Departments are working closely together to oversee delivery of the actions.

The membership comprises the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the City and County Managers' Association. ComReg, the independent Regulator for the telecommunications sector, also sits on the Group in an advisory role and also in respect of its ownership of a number of key actions. This key stakeholder interaction will ensure that strong momentum and timely delivery is maintained over the coming months, and will enable early identification and proactive management of any emerging challenges to the delivery of actions. In addition to overseeing the delivery of actions by the State entities, the Group will monitor and track progress made on actions owned by telecommunications operators. Quarterly progress reports are being produced and published on the status of Taskforce actions, the second quarterly report having been published in July 2017. The first two quarterly progress reports are accessible on the DCCA website. These demonstrate that good progress has been made in delivering the actions. I am also pleased at the sustained level of engagement between action owners and industry. In addition, a comprehensive Annual Review of progress will be undertaken at the end of 2017.

A National Stakeholder Forum will also be held on Friday 6 October 2017 in Athlone, to take stock of progress made in implementing the Taskforce actions and to enable discussion on all the issues impacting on the rollout of telecoms infrastructure. This work will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

The Forum will be hosted by me and by Minister Kyne, and it will feature a range of stakeholders from across the telecoms sector, including action owners, Government Departments, the independent Regulator, industry representatives, as well as consumer representatives. The event will afford an opportunity to review progress made, and to identify potential new actions. Feedback from this event will be incorporated into the Annual Review, in order to inform the

Year 1 Annual Report of the Implementation Group.

In addition, following Regulations which I signed last year, ComReg's announcement earlier this year of the results of its auction for the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, will mean an 86% increase in spectrum capacity to meet the growing demand for mobile and wireless broadband services across rural and urban areas. The award of 15 year licences for the rights of use in this band will provide stability and create future investment certainty. Spectrum was also awarded in lots covering 9 urban and rural regions across Ireland.

The very significant commercial investment by mobile operators has resulted in improved services, with at least one operator now having in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

*Questions Nos. 31 and 32 answered orally.*

*Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 30.*

*Question No. 34 answered orally.*

### **National Digital Strategy**

35. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the progress of the trading online voucher scheme, which is part of the national digital strategy; the take up of the scheme; and his plans to expand or further develop the scheme. [41789/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department's Trading Online Voucher Scheme is specifically designed to support small and micro enterprises to trade online. Through training and mentoring, coupled with financial support of up to €2,500, subject to matched funding, the scheme is helping small businesses to grow and diversify their markets.

This is a demand-led scheme, funded by my Department and delivered on a nationwide basis by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). I have allocated €3m in 2017 to deliver 1,000 more businesses trading online by the end of the year. By end June, 600 businesses had successfully applied to the Scheme this year, bringing to over 3,500 the number of businesses who have availed of grant assistance under the Scheme. Approximately 9,000 businesses have benefited from the training. The latest figures available show that 44 businesses in County Laois and 53 businesses in County Offaly have successfully applied for a trading online voucher since the scheme was introduced in 2014.

My Department has measured the impacts on the businesses who have participated. According to our surveys, businesses grow on average by 21%, employ 35% more people and 60% export for the first time. The Scheme is helping to revitalise small businesses, including sole traders, from across a wide range of sectors including retail, arts, crafts and design, manufacturing, food, and professional services. Digital trade is contributing to sustainable regional economic development, with urban and rural based businesses benefitting equally from the online opportunity.

My Department is currently scoping initiatives to build on the success of the scheme, putting Ireland further ahead of our European counterparts in realising the benefits of selling goods

and services online. This will include the development of a national website and centralised web-based infrastructure.

In collaboration with the LEOs, my Department is delivering a series of regional events to showcase the benefits of trading online, provide training and increase awareness of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme. Events have been held in Ballinasloe, Cork, Dublin, Kilkenny and Roscommon. Details of the next event, to take place in Cavan on 9th October, are available on my Department's website ([www.dccae.gov.ie/tradingonlinevoucher](http://www.dccae.gov.ie/tradingonlinevoucher)).

### **Broadband Service Provision**

36. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he remains satisfied that the provisions in place and proposed remain adequate to meet the target of the provision of broadband in all areas, urban and rural without exception; if there will be a need for extra initiatives to meet shortfalls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41879/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** As I have already indicated to the House, last week my Department received "Detailed Solutions" from two bidders as part of the ongoing procurement process to select a company, or companies, who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network for those areas that will not be served by commercial operators acting alone. This was a significant milestone in the procurement process which is now entering into its final stages. Early in 2018, it is expected that bidders will be invited to submit their final tenders.

The facts are that the National Broadband Plan has been a catalyst in driving commercial operators in their deployment of high speed broadband to the extent that today almost 7 out of 10 premises now have access to high speed broadband. This figure will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by 2018 and 9 out of 10 by 2020. In the last 6 months there has been a 150% increase in the number of pure fibre connections albeit from a low base.

eir has passed 101,000 premises as at the end of September and are on track to honour its commitment to provide 300,000 premises in rural Ireland with high speed broadband by the end of 2018, as agreed with me in April of this year. Other players in the market have also ramped up the speed of their roll out. For example, SIRO is investing €450m to provide fibre broadband to 500,000 premises across 51 towns on an open access basis, while enet and SSE are investing €100m in pure fibre broadband to 115,000 premises in the West and North West.

For the information of the Deputy, there are over 90,000 premises in County Kildare, 77,000 of which fall within a BLUE area and will be covered by commercial operators. Of these 77,000, circa 7,000 premises form part of eir's planned rural deployment. The remaining 13,000 premises in County Kildare fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce (the 'Taskforce') was established in July 2016 to consult and engage with telecoms industry representatives in order to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate telecommunications deficits, particularly in rural Ireland, prior to full build and rollout of the network planned under the State Intervention. Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers are already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring

a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to infrastructure. Contact details for the local Kildare Broadband Officer can be accessed on the link to the list of broadband officers on my Department's website.

### **Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan**

37. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to develop offshore wind energy in Irish waters; and the way in which he plans to integrate the transmission of connectors to such wind farms with additional electricity interconnectors to other electricity markets. [41905/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2014 (OREDPA) sets out the Government's plan for the sustainable development of our abundant offshore renewable energy resources. The Strategic Environmental Assessment carried out for the OREDPA found that it would be environmentally sustainable for 4,500 MW of offshore wind and 1,500MW of wave and tidal devices to be developed in Irish waters in the period to 2030.

Separately, and as the Deputy will already be aware, the Government has a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) scheme is being developed under which all forms of renewable energy technology, including offshore wind, are being considered. A public consultation on the development and design of the new scheme was launched earlier this month and will close on 3 November. The new scheme will then be designed to take account of the findings of this public consultation, and subject to Government and State Aid approval, should be open in 2018.

Enhanced energy connectivity however has the potential to help energy consumers benefit from a fully integrated European Internal Energy Market, as well as increasing the contribution that renewable energy can make to meeting our energy requirements.

On a wider front, Ireland is one of a number of countries who signed a political declaration in 2016 on closer energy cooperation in the North Seas area. One objective of this cooperation is to facilitate the further cost effective deployment of offshore renewable energy, particularly wind, through voluntary cooperation, with the aim of ensuring a sustainable, secure and affordable energy supply in the North Seas Countries. Officials from my Department and relevant agencies are actively engaged in this project.

### **National Broadband Plan**

38. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the impact that the reduction to two bidders will have on the national broadband plan; the way in which the agreement with a company (details supplied) has impacted on the plan; the timeframe for rollout; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41890/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I have given a detailed outline on the current status of the procurement process in my responses to the priority questions on today's order paper. The Deputy will be aware that this procurement process will select a bidder, or bidders, who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network to remote and rural areas not served by commercial operators. The successful bidder, or bidders, will build, maintain and operate this State intervention network for the next 25 years.



Last Tuesday, 26th September, 2017 was the closing date for bidders to submit their “Detailed Solutions” in the procurement process and I can confirm that my Department received submissions from two bidders. These bidders were Eircom Limited and the Granahan McCourt, enet, SSE, John Laing Group plc consortium. This is a significant and positive milestone in the process and the path to a digitally equal Ireland. The submissions received means that we are at the final stages of this procurement process. My Department’s specialist NBP team are now evaluating these two submissions over the coming weeks, with the expectation that very early in 2018 bidders will be invited to submit final tenders

As I have already informed the House, just ahead of the closing date for “Detailed Solutions”, SIRO formally communicated its withdrawal from the National Broadband Plan procurement process. In doing so however, SIRO remains strongly committed to its original commitment to invest €450m to provide pure fibre broadband to 51 towns across Ireland on an open access basis. As of the end of last week, some 100,000 premises have been passed by SIRO.

Notwithstanding SIRO’s withdrawal, the fact remains that this procurement process is still competitive involving two strong operators in the telecommunications field.

### Renewable Energy Incentives

39. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has read the research carried out by an organisation (details supplied) calling for an incentive scheme for solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity; if his Department will include solar PV in any new renewable electricity support scheme to replace the existing REFIT scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41704/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I am aware of the research referred to in the Question and my officials will review it the context of all submissions made through the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) public consultation process. The new RESS is being designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting Solar PV (both rooftop and ground mounted) and a range of other commercial renewable technologies, at various scales including micro-generation, 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.

By way of a comparison, at the end of 2016, in Ireland 27.2% of electricity demand was met by renewable sources, which is very close to the EU average and represents one of the highest asynchronous renewable electricity penetration levels in Europe or the rest of the world. Other EU member states renewable electricity figures for end 2015 can be found in the following table:

Country	2015 (% electricity from renewable sources)
Belgium	15.4
Bulgaria	19.1
Denmark	51.3
Greece	22.1
France	18.8

Country	2015 (% electricity from renewable sources)
Italy	33.5
Luxembourg	6.2
Netherlands	11.1
Austria	70.3
EU-28	28.8

Micro generation, including the use of solar PV panels on domestic rooftops, was also appraised as part of the RESS economic assessment. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before the introduction of a tariff for exported electricity from solar PV rooftop installations. These include, among others, a reform of electricity network charges, an assessment of the distributional impact of such a policy decision on the PSO (cost burden sharing between those who can afford to participate and those that can not), and development of a fair tariff for exported electricity taking the benefits of self-consumption into account.

This approach is in line with experience from other EU member states and other countries around the world for example, from America and from Australia and Germany, each of whom have attempted to introduce supports for micro generation and whose failure to address these issues from the outset has led to regressive distributional impacts on the poorer in society.

I am committed to finding an appropriate mechanism for supporting micro generation, but it must be achieved in a fair and balanced manner, as I believe that micro-generation will have an important role in Ireland's transition to a carbon free economy, in assisting Ireland meet its renewable electricity targets, and increasing social acceptance of and promoting renewable energy projects.

I have asked the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland to facilitate a workshop on micro generation which will take place on the 17th of this month. Over 100 focused stakeholders have been invited including the main trade organisations, public representatives, financial exerts, community groups, grid and energy sectors, NGOs and certain external organisations such as the FAI. 38 have already committed to attend and participate with the end goal being the development of a policy position on how to best support micro generation in Ireland.

Finally, 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 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)

### Waste Tyre Disposal

40. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address concerns that the proposed environmental levy on tyres will push consumers to procure tyres from outside of the State; the level of engagement he has had with the tyre industry, particularly in the Border counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41901/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Over 20,000 farms have been affected by illegal dumping. The level of illegal dumping of various waste types is a major environmental problem that needs to be met head on.

I have made €1.3 million available to support a major anti-dumping initiative by local authorities and communities. In addition, I have allocated €1 million to local authorities to remove stockpiles of waste tyres. The local authorities have indicated to me that there are more than 750,000 tyres randomly dumped in sites around the country, and this is a conservative estimate.

I have also taken actions to stem the problem of more waste tyres ruining rural areas. The new management scheme for waste tyres took effect on 1 October. Over 1,600 tyre retailer, producer and collector premises have already registered with the new scheme. This sign-up demonstrates to me that the overwhelming majority of tyre suppliers want to ensure that their products are managed properly as a waste. I welcome the efforts, as I am sure all Deputies do, that the compliant industry has made by joining the new scheme and working together to ensure that waste tyres do not continue to be a blight on our countryside.

A new compliance scheme for tyres will be operated by Repak End of Life Tyres (ELT) with a registration and reporting role for the Producer Register Limited (PRL). The scheme will carry out all regulatory functions on behalf of its members and will be funded by a visible Environmental Management Charge (vEMC). Currently the EU single market facilitates cross border trade. Fees for the collection and management of waste tyres have previously been charged, but this has not always been transparent or effective, as suggested by the level of tyres being dumped around the country. The flow of tyres from one jurisdiction to another has more to do with currency fluctuations than making an environmental cost on a tyre more visible.

I am very aware of the concerns of the tyre industry regarding the new structures. I have met with the tyre representative bodies. I listened to their concerns and I have done my best to address as many of them as possible. I have also received a lot of support during the extensive consultation that has taken place.

In order to support the compliant majority of the tyre industry, the new structures will be supported by a strong enforcement regime, which will be a priority for the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs). In addition, the EPA has a new enforcement role to ensure producers register with PRL and provide all relevant data. Tyres are one of the five priority areas for enforcement in 2017, as agreed by the National Waste Enforcement Steering Committee, and I have made €9 million available this year in relation to waste enforcement. I will be asking the EPA and Local Authorities to begin a visible enforcement campaign on tyres, particularly in border areas.

### **National Broadband Plan**

41. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the procurement status of the national broadband plan; the date by which every premises in the country will have access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41900/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** As I indicated in my responses to questions higher up on today's order paper, last week the procurement process being managed by my Department reached a key milestone with the receipt of "Detailed Submissions". Two submissions were received from Eircom Limited and the Granahan McCourt, enet, SSE, John Laing Group plc consortium. As the House is no doubt aware, SIRO formally communicated its withdrawal from the National Broadband Plan procurement process. SIRO remains strongly committed to its planned investment of €450m to provide fibre broadband in 51 towns across Ireland on an open access basis. As of the end of last week, some 100,000 premises have been passed by SIRO.



The NBP procurement process continues to be a competitive process, with two strong operators in the telecommunications field. The procurement process has now entered its final stages and as I've indicated to the House today, I expect that Final Tenders will be invited in early 2018.

### Ministerial Meetings

42. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times he has met with the officials of a company (details supplied) since the signing of the agreement to provide 300,000 homes with broadband outside of the scope of the national broadband plan; the dates he met with the company; the officials which were present; and the nature of discussions. [41960/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In April, eir signed a agreement with me committing it to follow through on its 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. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie). Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are published on my Department's website.

In line with the published Agreement there are regular review meetings between officials from my Department and eir, the purpose of which is to monitor this rollout and ensure that eir meets its obligations under the Agreement. I am not involved on a day to day basis in this detailed monitoring.

*Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 31.*

### Telecommunications Services Provision

44. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason phone and mobile broadband signals in city suburbs of counties Waterford, Cork, Galway and Dublin are non-existent in certain areas; and the measures he is taking to force companies to increase their work capabilities. [41963/17]

59. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing concerns in relation to poor mobile telephone coverage in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan; if he has discussed with the communications Regulator the need for the telecommunications companies to make the necessary investments to ensure that all areas have adequate mobile coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41852/17]

75. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the outcome of discussions he has had with the telecommunications Regulator and with the telecoms providers in relation to inadequate mobile telephone coverage in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41853/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 44, 59 and 75 together.

The provision of telecommunications services, including mobile phone and broadband services, is a matter for the service providers concerned which operate in a fully liberalised market regulated by the independent Regulator of the telecommunications sector, the Commission for

Communications Regulation (ComReg). I do not have a statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services to particular locations.

Any customer across Ireland who experiences service difficulties should raise the matter with the service provider in the first instance. If this fails to resolve matters, customers can and should refer a complaint to ComReg, which will investigate the service provider's compliance with its contractual obligations.

Notwithstanding the independence of ComReg, I recognise the frustration experienced across Ireland where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. In that regard, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force. In July 2016, I established the Task Force to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The December 2016 report of the Taskforce is available on my Department's website.

The Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders to produce the report which contains 40 actions to alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland. To maintain momentum, I established an Implementation Group to drive and monitor implementation of the actions, bringing together all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This group will report on progress every 90 days. The Implementation Group has met twice this year, in March and July, and is due to meet again in October. Two quarterly progress reports have been published so far, which are available on my Department's website. These demonstrate that good progress has been made in delivering the actions. I am also pleased at the sustained level of engagement between action owners and industry.

A stakeholder forum is planned for later this month, to be held in Athlone, to take stock of progress made in implementing the Taskforce actions and to enable discussion on all the issues impacting on the rollout of telecoms infrastructure. It will also inform the review to be conducted prior to completion of an annual report by the Implementation Group at end 2017.

This work will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, following regulations which I signed last year, ComReg's announcement earlier this year of the results of its auction for the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, will mean an 86% increase in spectrum capacity to meet the growing demand for mobile and wireless broadband services across rural and urban areas. The award of 15 year licences for the rights of use in this band will provide stability and create future investment certainty. Spectrum was also awarded in lots covering 9 urban and rural regions across Ireland.

The very significant commercial investment by mobile operators has resulted in improved services, with at least one operator now having in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

## **Fisheries Protection**

45. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure the preservation and development of wild brown trout in lakes and rivers in circumstances in which it is indigenous; his policy towards the threat posed by pike to wild brown trout; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41702/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) launched policies on brown trout and pike in August 2014. These policies, approved by the Board of IFI, were developed by two working groups which included *inter alia* representatives from the main Trout and Pike Angling Federations.

A review of these policies was scheduled to commence in 2017. However, recognising the concerns of some stakeholders in relation to elements of the policies, the Board of IFI decided to bring forward the review period and commence the process in 2016 with a public consultation process. The public consultation process was held in November 2016 through which almost 300 submissions were received.

One of the most important issues considered in the previous policies relates to the management of pike in designated wild brown trout fisheries. In late 2016, a Review Group, across all disciplines in IFI, was established to specifically consider this issue. The Review Group met with Pike and Trout representative bodies in January 2017 following which representatives from a number of these organisations were invited to join the Group.

In May 2017, the Group, including the pike and trout angling representatives, met for two information gathering meetings at which a number of expert scientists made presentations. The Review Group adjourned after its meeting of 29 May to provide time to review and assimilate the data and information provided during the two information gathering meetings. The Group reconvened earlier this month.

The presentations delivered at the meetings, along with minutes of the previous meetings and the public consultation submissions are publically available on the IFI website: [www.fisheriesireland.ie](http://www.fisheriesireland.ie).

I want to emphasise that while the policy review is underway, delivery of the current IFI pike management practices have continued in line with the existing policy. Therefore there has been no change to current policy or practice regarding the management of pike in designated wild brown trout fisheries.

It would not be appropriate, in these circumstances, to make any recommendations on policy change in advance of the report from the inclusive Review Group or to pre-empt its recommendations. IFI have advised that the report is expected to be finalised in early 2018. Decisions on any change in the management of Pike and Trout will be made as soon as possible thereafter.

I am advised by IFI that they recognise the diverse opinions of stakeholders and as a Public Authority are obliged to consider all viewpoints on this issue. I would encourage open and objective participation by all stakeholders in the Review Group in order to seek consensus on the main issues.

### **National Mitigation Plan**

46. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will strengthen the national mitigation plan by including concrete actions and targets in line with Ireland's international emissions obligations and also end Ireland's reliance on purchasing emissions units further to criticisms (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41705/17]

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he remains satisfied that greenhouse gas reductions over

the next ten years can be met; if further provisions can be made to meet such targets without damaging industry or agriculture; the extent to which marginal lands can be used in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41880/17]

63. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated annual funding required to enable the full implementation of the national mitigation plan published in July 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41701/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 46, 50 and 63 together.

The publication of Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan in July 2017 is an important initial step to enable the transition to a low carbon economy and society. The Plan identifies over 70 mitigation measures and 106 related actions to address the immediate challenge to 2020 and to prepare for the EU targets that Ireland will take on for 2030. Although the Plan does 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.

There is no doubt that delivery of the measures in the National Mitigation Plan will, in many cases, require significant investment. However, decisions on the funding of particular measures will be a matter for Government consideration in the context of expenditure planning in the Estimates and Budgetary processes, including decisions on capital expenditure following the mid-term review of the current Capital Plan and in the forthcoming National Investment Plan for 2018-2027.

Where relevant, the National Mitigation Plan already includes information on the expected Exchequer cost of implementing individual measures, either in the context of direct expenditure or in relation to tax foregone. The actual expenditure on a given measure will depend on progress in implementation of each measure, including its possible expansion as a result of additional funding, for which the relevant sectoral Minister retains direct responsibility. I, and other sectoral Ministers with a role in the National Mitigation Plan, continue to engage with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in the context of the Budget and Estimates process with a view to ensuring that the investment requirements arising from the National Mitigation Plan are appropriately reflected in Budget 2018.

In addition to measures in place, the National Mitigation Plan includes measures under consideration by Government. The potential costs for many of these measures have yet to be quantified and will depend on the basis on which a given measure is adopted for implementation.

As already stated, given the complexity of the issues and time horizon involved, it is not possible for the National Mitigation Plan to provide a complete roadmap to achieve our 2050 objective. Similarly, it does not yet provide a complete roadmap to meeting Ireland's expected targets between 2021 and 2030 under the draft EU Effort Sharing Regulation. Instead, the Plan will be subject to formal review at least once every five years and will also become a living document, accessible on my Department's website, which will be updated on an on-going basis as analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate further cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. This continuous review process reflects the broad and evolving nature of the sectoral challenges outlined in the Plan, coupled with the continued development and deployment of emerging low carbon and cost effective technologies across different sectors of the economy. As this first Plan moves into the implementation phase, this process will enable it to be amended, refined and strengthened over time and assist in keeping Ireland on target to meet our obligations.

## Renewable Energy Projects

47. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if micro or community led renewable energy projects will be given access to the national electricity grid in future Government legislation. [41840/17]

61. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the current RESS plan announced by him will encourage or facilitate disadvantaged or rural communities to participate in renewable energy projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41842/17]

79. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the new RESS scheme will help local communities embrace renewable energy projects such as wind energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41838/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos 47, 61 and 79 together.

My Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable electricity 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.

The new RESS will provide pathways for delivering on the 2015 Energy White Paper commitment to ensure communities and citizens are at the centre of the future energy transition in Ireland. Communities are effectively being designed into the fabric of the new scheme and a comprehensive assessment of policies and support measures to increase community ownership from renewable electricity projects has been undertaken. International best practice has been examined, and the most effective policies to increase community ownership and participation in renewable electricity projects have been assessed and examined within an Irish context.

Examples of some of these policies include a mandatory requirement for all renewable electricity projects seeking financial support through the new scheme to offer investment and/or ownership opportunities to the local community; the facilitation of grid access for community-led projects; a ring fencing of capacity (MW) for community-led projects; and the establishment of a national community benefits register. Furthermore, the Scheme will establish a network of trusted intermediaries who will act as independent facilitators between communities and developers to support community participation in renewable energy projects.

These recommendations could have a profound effect, boosting community ownership of and involvement in the renewable energy transition in Ireland.

Micro generation, including the use of solar PV panels on domestic rooftops, was also appraised as part of the RESS economic assessment. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before the introduction of a tariff for exported electricity from solar PV rooftop installations. These include amongst others, a reform of network charges, an assessment of the distributional impact of such a policy decision on the PSO (cost burden sharing), and development of a fair tariff for exported electricity taking the benefits of self-consumption into account. This approach is in line with experience from other EU member



states who have attempted to introduce supports for micro generation.

I am committed to finding an appropriate mechanism for supporting micro generation, as I believe that micro-generation will have an important role in Ireland's transition to a carbon free economy, in assisting Ireland meet its renewable electricity targets, and increasing social acceptance of and promoting renewable energy projects right across the country. I have asked the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to facilitate a workshop on micro generation, and this will take place later this month. All relevant stakeholders will be invited to participate with the end goal being the development of a policy position on how best to support micro generation in Ireland.

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 public 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)

*Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 30.*

### **Rural Broadband Scheme**

49. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress to date on the rural broadband scheme with particular reference to offshore islands, the populations of which rely heavily on suitable connectivity for future sustainability. [41882/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland including those on our offshore islands. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

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. A significant milestone in that procurement process was reached last week with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders which is expected to occur in early 2018.

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.

It is intended that all premises will have access to services of at least 30 Megabits per second when the procurement process for the State led intervention is completed and the network rolled out.

*Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 46.*

## National Mitigation Plan

51. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the national mitigation plan will be discussed in Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41906/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The publication of Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan in July 2017 was an important initial step to enable the transition to a low carbon economy and society. The governance and reporting arrangements that underpin the National Mitigation Plan will be critical to successfully delivering on the full range of over 70 measures and 106 related actions in the Plan. Under section 14 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment is required to present an Annual Transition Statement (ATS) to each House of the Oireachtas by 10 December each year.

The Annual Transition Statement for 2017 will have two main elements. The "Annual National Transition Statement" itself will set out an overview of both mitigation and adaptation policy measures adopted; a record of emissions of greenhouse gases set out in the most recent national greenhouse gas emissions inventory and a projection of future greenhouse gas emissions; and a report on compliance by the State with any existing or future obligations under EU law or international agreements referred to in Section 2 of the Act.

In addition, each sectoral Minister designated under the 2015 Act for the purposes of the National Mitigation Plan (Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Housing, Planning and Local Government; Transport, Tourism and Sport; Agriculture, Food and the Marine) is required to include an "Annual Sectoral Mitigation Transition Statement." Each Sectoral Mitigation Transition Statement must set out a record of the sectoral mitigation measures adopted by the Minister of the Government presenting the annual sectoral mitigation transition statement concerned, and an assessment of the effectiveness of the sectoral mitigation measures in the achievement of their purpose.

Starting in 2018, it is my intention to produce an annual progress report on the implementation of the National Mitigation Plan. This annual progress report will incorporate the key provisions of the Annual Transition Statement and will also record progress in relation to each of the actions set out in the National Mitigation Plan. In order to align the Annual Transition Statement requirements under the 2015 legislation with the National Mitigation Plan annual progress report, I propose to incorporate these into a single document from 2018 onwards. This annual reporting process will facilitate debate on the implementation of the National Mitigation Plan in both Houses of the Oireachtas in each subsequent year.

*Questions Nos. 52 and 53 answered with Question No. 27.*

## Waste Disposal Charges

54. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to increases in charges for household waste collection in recent weeks; and if his Department has considered in recent years an alternative permitting charging structure for household waste collection. [41832/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** A Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group has been established and the first meeting of the Group was held on 13 September, 2017. A company has also begun 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. The Waste Management (Collection Permit) (Amendment) Regulations 2016, S.I. No. 24 of 2016, amended the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, S.I. No. 820 of 2007, to provide a new charging structure for applications for waste collection permits, which includes permits which authorise household waste collection.

### National Digital Strategy

55. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of applications for and the number of businesses taking part in the trading online voucher scheme which is part of the national digital strategy in County Offaly, by year since its introduction. [41788/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Trading Online Voucher Scheme, designed and funded by my Department, is delivered on a nationwide basis by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO). Applications are received directly by individual LEOs who award vouchers of up to €2,500 matched-funding to qualifying businesses on a competitive basis, following evaluation by an expert panel. Successful applicants are expected to complete their trading online project within 4 months, subsequent to which grants can be drawdown, following standard verification procedures. My Department does not hold information on the number of applications to the scheme.

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is a demand-led scheme. Prospective applicants must attend an information session organised by the LEO prior to application to the scheme. This is designed to equip the business with some expert advice on how to think digitally for their business and to support the development of their trading online proposal.

The following table provides information on the number of attendees at information sessions and the number of applications approved under the scheme in Offaly from 2014 to date.

Year	2014 (July to Dec)	2015	2016	2017 to date
No. of attendees at information sessions/one-to-one mentoring	25	3	36	23
No. of applications approved (businesses which have completed or are in the process of completing their trading online project).	6	24	14	12

*Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 31.*

### Renewable Heat Incentive

57. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether delays in the launch of the renewable heat incentive has stalled developments in the biomass industry and makes it even more likely that Ireland will fail to meet its renewable heat targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41899/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The proposed Renewable Heat Incentive will incentivise commercial opportunities for renewable heat technologies including biomass boiler installations. In addition, the scheme will open up new opportunities for biomass feedstock producers. There has been significant progress to date in the use of biomass which, in 2015, provided the vast majority of the 6.5% of energy consumption in the heat sector that came from renewable sources.

The development of the Renewable Heat Incentive has involved detailed economic analysis, extensive engagement with industry and two public consultations. The most recent of these consultations took place earlier this year and over 100 submissions were received. It is vital that views of stakeholders and the lessons learned in other jurisdictions are integrated into the design of the proposed Renewable Heat Incentive. In particular, I intend the scheme to include eligibility criteria and budgetary controls in order to manage the overall costs and maintain value for money for taxpayers.

The scheme has a key role to play in contributing to meeting our 2020 renewable energy targets. It is therefore vital that the Renewable Heat Incentive is in place well in advance of 2020 in order to ensure projects are in operation in 2020 thus contributing to meeting our targets.

I will seek Government approval for the scheme shortly. Following this approval, it will be necessary to seek European Commission State Aid approval in advance of the scheme commencing in 2018.

*Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 31.*

*Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 44.*

## **Brexit Issues**

60. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address concerns that Brexit will jeopardise ongoing co-operation between Northern Ireland and the State in the area of environmental management and protection; if he has engaged with his Northern Irish and UK counterparts on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41902/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** North/South cooperation is a central part of the Good Friday Agreement. Under the Agreement, the North South Ministerial Council was established to develop consultation, cooperation and action on matters of mutual interest on an all-island and cross border basis.

Protecting the gains of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts have been identified by both the EU and the UK as a priority to be addressed within the context of the Article 50 negotiations. The European Commission Taskforce, led by Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, represents the EU27 in the Article 50 negotiations with the UK.

In its paper on Guiding Principles for the Dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland, the EU Commission Taskforce has recognised the central importance of North South cooperation and states that it should be protected across all relevant sectors.

While progress continues to be made, there is substantial work that remains to be done. Irish officials remain in close contact with Mr Barnier's team to progress this work. It is not possible at this stage to say with certainty what impact the UK leaving the EU will have on sectors including the environment. This will be largely dependent on the shape of the future

relationship between the EU and UK.

Since the formation of the new UK Government, I met with Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, on Monday 19th June, at the Environment Council in Luxembourg. This is the latest in a number of bilateral meetings I have had with my UK counterparts.

In February this year I attended the EU Environment Council. I used this opportunity to hold bilateral discussions on the potential impacts of Brexit on the Irish and European energy sectors with the UK Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy, Mr Jesse Norman. I also held discussions with Simon Hamilton, Minister for the Economy in the Northern Ireland Executive, on the margins of the North South Ministerial Council in September last.

*Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 47.*

### **Post Office Network**

62. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on changes with An Post, both retail and mail businesses; and the steps he plans to take in the coming months to ensure that services are protected. [41833/17]

81. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address concerns that wholesale closures of post offices are imminent; his further plans for the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41898/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 81 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 relating to the company's mails and retail businesses 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, An Post has entered a period of long term structural decline mainly due to the impact of eSubstitution on mail volumes and post office transactions. 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.

In response to the challenges it is facing, a strategic review of An Post, including the post office network, which will identify the changes and restructuring necessary to maintain the company on a sound financial footing was initiated and 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.

*Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 46.*

### **Climate Change Policy**

64. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expected matters that the national dialogue on climate change will include. [41896/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I understand that the Citizens' Assembly met on 30 September and 1 October and will meet again in November to consider the topic of how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change and that these sessions will be informed by a public consultation which took place in August. As part of this work, I understand that the Assembly has been asked to consider how the National Dialogue on Climate Action should engage with the wider public to create awareness, engagement and motivation to act in relation to the challenges of climate change.

The primary objective of the National Dialogue will be to ensure an inclusive process of engagement and consensus building across society towards enabling the transformation to a low carbon and climate-resilient future. To do this, the Dialogue will seek to create awareness, engagement and motivation to act (locally, regionally and nationally) in relation to the challenges presented by climate change and to establish, on a long term basis, appropriate networks for people to meet periodically to consider evidence-based inputs on the economic, social, behavioural, environmental and public aspects of climate and energy policy.

I expect that the work of the Citizens' Assembly will provide a valuable base of evidence and ideas from which to draw on in the preparation of further activities under the National Dialogue in the coming months, including proposals for regional gatherings and local community conversations incorporating innovative consultation mechanisms.

National Dialogue initiatives already announced for 2017 include the Green Schools National Climate Change Action and Awareness Programme, incorporating Climate Action Week between 16 and 20 October and the Green Schools Climate Expo on 22 February 2018; and the Climate Ambassador Programme which was formally launched on the 18 September 2017.

*Question No. 65 answered with Question No. 30.*

### **National Broadband Plan**

66. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when his Department first announced plans to introduce the national broadband plan; the dates on which various Ministers held press conferences to publicise it; the expected commencement and completion dates given by ministers at each of these press conferences; the projected commencement and completion dates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41708/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I refer the Deputy to my replies to Question Number 72 of 6 December 2016, Number 43 of 7 February 2017, Number 85 of 9 May 2017 and Number 88 of 27 June 2017.

By way of additional information, we have now reached a significant milestone in the procurement process for the State led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). Last Tuesday, 26th September, 2017, my Department received submissions from two bidders, legally termed “Detailed Solutions”. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders, which are expected early next year, and ultimate progression to the appointment of a preferred bidder or bidders.

### **Energy Prices**

67. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the analyses that have been undertaken by his Department on Irish energy prices which are one of the highest compared to other EU member states. [41835/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Responsibility for the regulation and monitoring of electricity markets is a matter for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) which is the independent energy regulator. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), is the lead organisation for the submission of Irish data on electricity and gas prices to Eurostat, and also publishes reports and analysis of these statistics twice yearly. The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) publishes reports on various business costs, including on electricity price statistics with commentary and analysis.

In the area of electricity prices, CRU carries out statutory market monitoring functions and has the responsibility to ensure the market operates competitively for the benefit of the consumer, under various relevant Statutory Instruments. In February 2017 the CRU published its “Review of Competition in the Electricity and Gas Retail Markets: A Consumer Focused Assessment”, in line with its competition and consumer protection functions and reflecting a CRU commitment in the energy policy White Paper to publish a consumer focussed assessment of the development of competition in retail markets. This report, as well as CRU’s quarterly “Electricity and Gas Retail Markets Reports”, published since 2010, are available on the CRU website. I am periodically provided with briefing and commentary on these publications.

The CRU’s review of competition in the electricity and gas retail markets makes a number of detailed findings, specifically in relation to consumer engagement, consumer protection, market entry and prices. It concludes by making a number of proposals to address the issues identified within the report, and it will be important that the outcomes of these proposals both for consumers and for competition are analysed and assessed in due course.

In this regard I must reiterate that the CRU is accountable for the performance of its functions to a Committee of the Oireachtas, and not to me the Minister or indeed the Government.

### **Bord na Móna**

68. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has given consideration to the application by Board Na Móna to purchase a wood pellet factory in Georgia; and the way in which the government would reach a decision on such an investment. [41897/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts, 1946 to 1998. The matter raised by the Deputy is operational in nature and not one in which I, as Minister, have any direct function. Nevertheless, as Minister with responsibility

for Bord na Móna, I am aware of the proposed plans to construct a biomass facility in the United States. I wish to advise the Deputy that an investment of this nature by Bord na Móna is subject to Ministerial approval from both myself and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform as the shareholding Ministers. Any request for Ministerial consent would be subject to detailed financial analysis by NewERA and policy analysis by the shareholding Departments. At this juncture, there has been no formal request for Ministerial consent in respect of this project.

### **Waste Management**

69. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the work carried out to date by the pricing watchdog monitoring unit in relation to waste management; the composition of this unit; the frequency with which it has met since its establishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41707/17]

**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 attended by 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.

### **Renewable Heat Incentive**

70. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the interactions his Department has had with other Government Departments to encourage the growth of indigenous biomass further to the recent launch of Bioenergy Ireland. [41836/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** As the Deputy has indicated, there are a wide range of Government departments, agencies and State bodies that are critical enablers for biomass development by virtue of their responsibility for areas such as energy, forestry, agriculture, waste, research funding and busi-

ness development. The interdepartmental Bioenergy Steering Group, chaired by my Department, is in the process of finalising a Bioenergy Plan for public consultation. This group includes representation from eight Government departments and a number of State agencies. It met most recently on 3 October.

The Bioenergy Plan will highlight the range of supply-side and demand-side measures that are needed to release the potential of the domestic biomass sector in Ireland. I expect it will be published for public consultation in the coming months.

One of the key measures in the Bioenergy Plan is the proposed Renewable Heat Incentive. This scheme is a demand side measure with the principal objective of contributing to meeting our national renewable energy targets. In addition, the scheme provides a key opportunity for the domestic biomass sector. The Renewable Heat Incentive will be designed to incentivise commercial opportunities for renewable heat technologies including biomass boiler installations and it is expected that, arising from this, new opportunities will open up for biomass feedstock producers.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

71. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the programme for Government commitment on broadband. [32477/17]

80. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll out of the national broadband plan. [41903/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 80 together.

I have given a detailed outline on the current status of the procurement process in my responses to the priority questions on today's order paper. The Deputies will be aware that this procurement process will select a bidder, or bidders, who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network to remote and rural areas not served by commercial operators. The successful bidder, or bidders, will build, maintain and operate this State intervention network for the next 25 years.

Last Tuesday, 26th September, 2017 was the closing date for bidders to submit their "Detailed Solutions" in the procurement process and I can confirm that my Department received submissions from two bidders. These bidders were Eircom Limited and the Granahan McCourt, enet, SSE, John Laing Group plc consortium. This is a significant and positive milestone in the process and the path to a digitally equal Ireland. The submissions received means that we are at the final stages of this procurement process.

My Department's specialist NBP team will now evaluate these two submissions over the coming weeks, with the expectation that very early in 2018 bidders will be invited to submit final tenders.

I am confident that the combination of existing commercial investment and the State intervention will make Ireland an exemplar in Europe and beyond, in terms of providing high speed services to all citizens regardless of where they live or work.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

72. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the engagement he has held with his counterpart in the United Kingdom since June 2017 on the issue of cross-Border co-operation to ensure all island broadband capability. [41964/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** There have been no meetings between officials from my Department and our Northern Ireland counterparts in relation to an all island broadband network. Achieving universal access to high speed broadband is a key target under the EU Digital Agenda for Europe which requires, inter alia, all Member States to publish National Broadband Plans to facilitate the achievement of high speed broadband access of at least 30Mbps to all citizens. The link to the Study on National Broadband Plans in the 28 EU-Member States is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/broadband-member-states>

The Irish Government committed to facilitating investment with policy and regulatory support and to funding a State intervention to provide high speed broadband to all premises in the State.

The 2012 National Broadband Plan (NBP) published in August 2012 outlined the Government's commitment to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland, regardless of location. Delivery of High Speed Broadband is a specific priority under the Programme for Government and reflects European objectives.

Ireland's telecommunications market has been liberalised since 1999 and has developed into a well-regulated market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators providing services over a telecommunications network. The State is not a service provider and can only intervene, subject to EU competition rules, to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market has failed to deliver such services.

### Gender Equality

73. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if future funding proposals for RTÉ or other networks will contain gender equality pay guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41841/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** RTÉ is established under the Broadcasting Act 2009 as the national public service broadcaster. Section 114 (1) of the Act states the principal objects and associated powers of RTÉ and section 98 provides that it shall be independent in the pursuance of these objects, subject to the requirements of the Act. As such I, as Minister, have no function in RTÉ's day to day operations.

### EU Conventions

74. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions his Department will be taking concerning breaches in view of the decision of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee recommendations concerning environmental impact assessment on the Hinkley Point nuclear reactors in Britain. [41834/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I refer the reply to Question No 1468 of 11 September 2017 on the issue of the



Aarhus Convention.

In relation to the development of the Hinkley Point C new nuclear power plant, I can advise the Deputy that my Department has taken a keen interest in the project since it was initially proposed. It formed part of a study by the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, now merged with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), of all proposed new nuclear build projects in the United Kingdom. The study was published in 2013.

Ireland enjoys a close working relationship with the United Kingdom on radiological matters of mutual interest. This relationship is formalised through a UK-Ireland Contact Group which meets biannually. The UK's new nuclear build programme, including Hinkley Point C, is a standing agenda item at these meetings.

Senior officials from my Department and the EPA have been invited to visit the site to learn more about the project. This visit will take place shortly.

Ireland's established position is that, while not a nuclear energy producing country, we acknowledge the right of States to determine their own energy mix. However, we expect that, where a State chooses to develop a nuclear power industry, this will be done in line with the highest international standards with respect to safety and environmental protection.

*Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 44.*

### **Electric Vehicles**

76. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures he is taking to support the roll out of rapid charge points for electric vehicles. [41904/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The ESB, through its eCars programme, has rolled out an extensive public network of charging points across Ireland. With approximately 900 electric vehicle charge points, for a country of our size, we have one of the more comprehensive charge point networks in Europe. As battery technology develops, the range of electric cars will grow and higher capacity charging will be needed to support quicker charge times and longer travelling ranges.

The provision of electric vehicle infrastructure, particularly the installation of public charging points, is a key focus of the work of the Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce. The Taskforce is co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and is examining options for infrastructure, regulation and pricing in order to devise a sustainable policy framework for effective and efficient electric vehicle recharging. The work of the Taskforce is well underway with a stakeholder engagement event in July helping inform proposals in relation to Budget 2018.

Large car manufacturers are also expected to become involved in the provision of high-powered infrastructure. A number of providers are likely to emerge onto the Irish market in the coming years. Through its dealer network Nissan already has a number of charge points available through its dealer network and Tesla has recently opened its first supercharger location in Ireland.

### **National Broadband Plan**

77. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the withdrawal of a company (details supplied) from the national broadband competition will result in higher costs to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41839/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** As I have already indicated to the House, last week my Department received “Detailed Solutions” from two bidders as part of the ongoing procurement process to select a bidder, or bidders, who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network for those areas that will not be served by commercial operators acting alone. These bidders were Eircom Limited and the Granahan McCourt, enet, SSE, John Laing Group plc consortium. This is a significant and positive milestone in the process and the path to a digitally equal Ireland. The submissions received means that we are at the final stages of this procurement process. My Department’s specialist NBP team are now evaluating these two submissions over the coming weeks, with the expectation that very early in 2018, bidders will be invited to submit final tenders. As the level of State subsidy required for the National Broadband Plan will be determined through the competitive tender process, it would be premature and not in the public interest, to discuss costs while that procurement process is still in train. The process remains competitive.

As the House is aware, SIRO formally withdrew from the procurement process last week. SIRO remain strongly supportive of the National Broadband Plan and will focus on its investment of €450m to provide fibre broadband to 500,000 premises across 51 towns.

The facts are that the National Broadband Plan has been a catalyst in driving commercial operators in their deployment of high speed broadband to the extent that today almost 7 out of 10 premises now have access to high speed broadband. This figure will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by 2018 and 9 out of 10 by 2020. In the last 6 months there has been a 150% increase in the number of pure fibre connections.

I am confident that the combination of existing commercial investment and the State intervention will make Ireland an exemplar in Europe and beyond, in terms of providing high speed services to all citizens regardless of where they live or work.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

78. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment Ireland’s position in relation to meeting its 2020 carbon emission targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41881/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 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 eco-

conomic 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. 79 answered with Question No. 47.*

*Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 71.*

*Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 62.*

### **National Broadband Plan**

82. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason areas of the national broadband map are blue in areas of the country that denote rivers and forests indicating they are supported by companies yet the houses next to the blue areas are amber and are not supported by broadband such as in Cloyne, County Cork. [41962/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Deputy may be aware that all premises, regardless of location, are targeted to receive broadband under the National Broadband Plan. The high speed broadband Map, which can be accessed on my Department's at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), shows all premises to be covered under the Plan, which include State Intervention and commercial investment.

The Map is colour coded Amber for areas to be covered by the State rollout and Blue for areas where commercial operators are delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. Light Blue areas on the Map include homes and businesses to be served under eir's rural planned deployment broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018. By necessity, the map will include the geographical spread of Ireland - townlands, rivers, lakes etc. The townland of Townparks, (ed Cloyne) comprise a mix of premises to be covered by either commercial or state led intervention and are colour coded accordingly.

## Exploration Licences Approvals

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will refrain from issuing future licences for oil or gas exploration in view of the State's commitments under the Paris treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41837/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Paris Agreement, which entered into force in November 2016, aims to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with an ambition of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The Agreement is designed to meet this objective through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted by all parties to the agreement. In this regard, the European Union submitted an NDC committing to a reduction of at least 40% in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, which will be met through reductions of 43% in the Emission Trading System (ETS) and 30% in the non-ETS sector compared with 2005 levels.

Ireland will contribute to the Paris Agreement via the NDC tabled by the EU on behalf of its Member States. The specific details of Ireland's contribution are currently being negotiated between the EU and its Member States.

The Energy White Paper "Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030" sets out a vision and framework to guide Irish energy policy and the actions that Government intends to take in the energy sector from now up to 2030, aimed at transforming Ireland's fossil-fuel based energy sector into a clean, low carbon system by 2050. This ambitious vision for Ireland's energy system envisages a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from that sector by 80-95% relative to 1990 levels by 2050. The White Paper identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050.

Ireland's transition to a low carbon energy future will involve progressively moving to lower emissions fuels, e.g. moving initially from peat and coal to natural gas, and ultimately towards an even greater reliance on renewable energy. In that regard, the Government has introduced a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and deliver energy efficiency. In 2015, over 25% of Ireland's electricity was generated from renewable energy sources.

The White Paper also recognises that oil and natural gas will remain significant elements of Ireland's energy supply in that transition period.

Ireland sources all its oil needs from abroad. In addition, Ireland currently sources its gas supply from the Kinsale gasfields, the Corrib gasfield and the gas pipeline from Moffat in Scotland. Corrib and Kinsale are not in a position to meet all of Ireland's annual gas demand and so Ireland will continue to rely on gas via Great Britain for the foreseeable future. The Kinsale fields are expected to cease production by 2021 while Corrib production is projected to decrease to 50 per cent of its initial levels by 2025.

Taking this into account, successful exploration in Ireland's Offshore has the potential to deliver benefits to Irish society and the economy, particularly in terms of enhanced security of supply and reduced fossil fuel imports, as we transition to a low carbon future.

84. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his plans for Seanad reform. [41721/17]

**Taoiseach (Deputy Leo Varadkar)(Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Government stated its commitment to pursuing the implementation of the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform (the Manning Report).

That Report was published in 2015 and it is available on my Department's website.

One of the recommendations of the Report was the establishment of an Implementation Group to oversee implementation of the reforms contained in the Report.

As my predecessor previously said in the House, he agreed with a suggestion made here some time ago by Deputy Martin that this Group should be based in the Oireachtas and should comprise members of the Dáil and Seanad from all parties and groups, with access to independent expert advice as required. He wrote to Party Leaders in September last year seeking their agreement to this approach and their intention to participate. Contacts are continuing with parties to finalise nominations with a view to having the Group up and running as soon as possible.

### **Skills Shortages**

85. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to expand the EGFSN to include the HGV mechanics in view of the fact there appears to be a shortage of this skilled labour here. [42088/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is an independent, non-statutory body, whose role is to carry out research, analysis and horizon scanning in relation to emerging skills requirements at thematic and sectoral levels. Its follow up work involves engagement with the Department of Education and Skills, Higher Education Authority, SOLAS and other relevant bodies to produce an agreed action plan to address the skills needs identified.

The Group has a broad sectoral membership, including representatives from the business community, education and training providers, trade unions, and a small number of Government Departments and agencies.

I assume the deputy is asking for a commitment that the Expert Group will examine and make proposals to deal with shortages of HGV mechanics.

The Expert Group undertook a study of the demand for skills in the wider freight transport, distribution and logistics sector in 2015, in which the role of vehicle mechanics and technicians, while not prevalent in numbers (c.1% of total staff in companies surveyed for the study), was highlighted as important to the sector's performance and quality of service.

The Group made a number of recommendations for addressing the broader skills needs in the sector, and thereby addressing its poor image, and issues around retention and lack of career pathways. These included the development of national occupation standards, new apprenticeship and traineeship programmes, improved training provision, enhancing awareness of the sector, and establishment of a Sectoral Skills Engagement Group.

Implementation of these recommendations was handed over to the sector, its company base, and education and training providers, on publication of the report. The implementation of Expert Group reports is subject to regular review, and should serious issues persist, and with the



cooperation of the sector, the Group is willing to re-examine its skills needs.

### **Employment Rights**

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a breach of labour law has occurred in the case of former employee of an organisation (details supplied) who is concerned that their claims have not yet been investigated but have been relieved of their responsibilities in the interim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42132/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is independent in the exercise of its quasi-judicial function and I have no direct involvement in its day to day operations or adjudication function.

Where an individual believes that they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees, they may refer a complaint to the WRC where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication. Complaints can be made on a single complaint form available at the WRC's website *www.workplacerelations.ie*. Where such complaint is presented, the Director General shall, subject to section 39, refer the complaint for adjudication by an Adjudication Officer.

In addition, the WRC's Customer Service Section provides information to both employers and employees in relation to employment, equality and industrial relations rights and obligations and can be contacted at Lo-call 1890-808090 or 059-9178990.

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

87. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if help is available to persons that drew down their first tranche of mortgage before July 2016 for a self build house which was concluded in early 2017 in view of the fact that they appear to be excluded from the help to buy scheme under its current terms and conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42177/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I take it that the Deputy is referring to the possibility of a back-dating of eligibility for the Help-to-Buy Initiative (HTB) to before 19 July 2016.

The commencement date for HTB was chosen as it was the date of the launch of 'Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness', in which the development of such a scheme for inclusion in the Budget was initially announced. The intention to apply HTB from this date was announced at that time with a view to avoiding any potential interruption in house sales by purchasers who may otherwise have deferred purchases.

Individuals who purchased new homes before the announcement of the incentive did so without the expectation of such a relief. Similarly, those who commenced the drawdown of mortgages in respect of self-built properties before 19th of July would also not have expected a subsequently introduced tax relief to be available to them.

As with all time bound reliefs, there will always be those who just miss out on qualification. However, I do not propose that start date of this measure be changed as to do so would make HTB more costly and less targeted.

## Mortgage Data

88. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of homes lost or that are being examined as possible losses as a result of overcharging on tracker mortgages, by lender, to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42006/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has advised that, while rate rectification is almost complete for the majority of impacted customers identified to date, the redress and compensation phase of the Tracker Mortgage Examination is ongoing. Lenders are continuing to determine the exact circumstances and the impact of their failures for each individual account. Therefore, the Central Bank has indicated that lenders do not yet have complete figures for loss of ownership, which are impacted by tracker mortgage related issues.

However, my Department has sought information from the banks in which the State has a shareholding interest and has received the following responses:

AIB has indicated that it has identified circa 14 cases where the bank has deemed that the failure in relation to tracker mortgages may have caused a customer to lose their home. However, as the review is not yet complete, this number may change but the bank has indicated that it does not currently expect it to change substantially.

PTSB has also advised that, through the Mortgage Redress Programme which was completed in 2015, the bank identified 22 cases where it was determined that the loss of ownership may not have occurred had it not been for the bank's failure. However, the bank's work on this matter, including the Central Bank ordered industry wide review of tracker mortgages, is continuing and when it very recently appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach, the bank noted that some further loss of ownership cases as a result of the Tracker Mortgage Examination will arise. However, the bank advised that it expects this additional number to be low.

Bank of Ireland advised that it is currently conducting its examination of tracker mortgage related issues which covers, amongst other things, transparency of communications with and contractual rights of tracker mortgage customers. This process is ongoing and the bank indicated that it will provide further updates as the examination progresses.

## Tax Code

89. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a tax allowance for the parents of children that are working to bring it in line with the child dependants allowance of €29.80 per week (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42015/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I assume that the Deputy is referring to the €29.80 increase to certain social welfare benefits for a Qualified Child (IQC). This is not a tax allowance but is a part of the social welfare benefit available to the individual. In 2017 the Increase for a Qualified Child is €29.80 per week.

There is no generally available tax credit in respect of child dependants, but the Deputy will be aware that there are a number of tax credits which may apply to certain families with children, including the Single Person Child Carer tax credit, the Incapacitated Child tax credit, the Widowed Parent tax credit and the Home Carer tax credit.

Working families on lower incomes may also qualify for Family Income Supplement (FIS),

a weekly additional income payment available to employees with children. Further information on FIS is available from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The Deputy will also be aware that a new Affordable Childcare Scheme was introduced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs last year, to assist families with the costs involved in providing care for their children.

Taking into account the range of supports currently available both via the tax system and through direct supports, it is my view that the introduction of a new tax credit of the nature proposed by the Deputy would not be the best use of limited resources at this time.

### **Banking Operations**

90. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which a change to the rules to include the warehoused element of a split mortgage as a non-performing loan would alter the capital requirements of each Irish bank in view of the ECB's capitalisation rules and buffers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42020/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, I have no role in the day-to-day management or financial reporting of any bank in which the State is a shareholder. Financial reporting obligations and accounting practices are matters solely for the Board and Management of each institution. Each of the SSM (Single Supervisory Mechanism) regulated institutions produces detailed, externally audited accounts in line with international accounting best practice. In addition, these banks have required minimum capital levels, which are assessed and scrutinised by the Joint Supervisory team (JST) comprising officials of both the SSM and the Central Bank of Ireland.

The capital treatment of Non-Performing Loans and mortgage restructures, including split loans with a warehoused element, is in accordance with the CRD IV which forms the basis of prudential requirements for banks. The minimum capital requirements are determined by the annual Supervisory Review and Evaluation Process (SREP) conducted by the SSM.

The Central Bank have confirmed to my officials that "credit institutions are required to comply with a range of classification requirements including the Regulatory definition of default as per Article 178 of the Capital Requirements Regulation; the Accounting definition of impaired as per the applicable accounting framework (e.g. IAS 39) and the Supervisory definition of non-performing as per the EBA ITS\* on forbearance and non-performing exposures."

Therefore, each bank would need to consider the impact on its reporting and compliance obligations in the event of a hypothetical change as described by the Deputy. One cannot assume, in this regard, a direct impact from a change in definition determining the recognition of NPLs on the minimum capital requirements that would be assigned to an institution by the SSM as part of their SREP.

\*Implementing Technical Standard.

### **Corporation Tax**

91. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the proposal from a group (details supplied) regarding the introduction of a foreign minimum tax requirement in tandem with the proposed reduction in the US corporate tax rate to 20%; if he has conducted a risk impact assessment of these proposed changes to the economy here; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [42022/17]

92. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has written to or spoken to his counterpart in the US Administration in relation to President Trump's plans to change the way in which US corporate tax operates; and if so, if his department officials are preparing a response to same. [41865/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 92 together.

I note the publication by the US administration and Congressional leaders of a framework providing additional detail on their proposals for US tax reform.

While a reduction to the US corporate tax rate and a move to a territorial system are expected to be part of any legislative proposal building on this announcement, the substantive detail of any legislative proposal is not yet known. The framework suggests that the US proposals will seek to tax the global profits of US multinationals at a rate below whatever new headline rate is agreed. There has been no indication as to what level this lower rate may be set at. If agreed, this would represent a change from the current system where the US tax the global profits of US multinationals when those profits are repatriated to the US at the full headline US tax rate.

It is expected that the legislative debate on the proposals will begin later this month. Agreement between the House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate and President Trump will be needed before any legislation can ultimately be agreed and any changes can be introduced.

The exact implications of US tax reform for Ireland, and the rest of the world, will depend on the exact nature of any changes which are ultimately agreed.

I have not yet spoken directly to my counterpart in the US administration in relation to the administration's tax reform plans. My officials in the Department of Finance and our Embassies in the US, are closely tracking the debate in the US and continue to engage with business and others to fully understand the potential impacts of any US reform.

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

93. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance if the help to buy incentive scheme will be extended to first-time buyers that purchase a second hand house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42068/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will appreciate, with less than a week to go to Budget 2018, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this point on what may or may not be contained in that Budget.

### **Insurance Industry**

94. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to address alleged cartel like activity in the insurance industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42077/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory independent body responsible for the enforcement of domestic and EU competition law in the State. Section 9(5) of the Competition and Con-

sumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including carrying out investigations of alleged anti-competitive practices.

It is my understanding that the CCPC has been undertaking an investigation of suspected breaches of competition law in the motor insurance sector. However, as investigations and enforcement matters generally are part of the day-to-day operational work of the CCPC, neither I, nor the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, has a direct function in respect of such matters.

Separately, the European Commission on 4 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.

Again, I am not in a position to make any comment in relation to such actions being taken by the European Commission. Any inspection or investigation being undertaken by the Commission is done independently and I have no insight into the development of any such exercise.

Nevertheless, my 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. It published the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance 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 liability 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 levels of last year.



## **Budget Submissions**

95. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will examine a request by an organisation (details supplied); his plans regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42099/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department has so far received in the order of 370 Pre-Budget Submissions from a wide range of groups and individuals. These are being considered by the relevant officials in the context of Budget and Finance Bill preparation. I can confirm that a submission from Aid Link has been received. However, as the Deputy will be aware, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

## **IBRC Liquidation**

96. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the valuations on the remaining distressed assets at IBRC; when valuations were last done; the timeframe that has been set for disposing of these distressed assets; the estimated costs associated with this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42117/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by the Special Liquidators of IBRC that the vast majority of assets remaining in the liquidation are tied to on-going litigation. For reasons of confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, the Special Liquidators cannot provide any further detail on these assets at this time.

The Special Liquidators are committed to selling the remaining assets as quickly as is practical but are mindful that best price much be achieved for the remaining creditors of IBRC.

The Special Liquidators published their fourth progress update report on the liquidation of IBRC in May 2017, which is available on the Department of Finance website [http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/170505-IBRC-Progress-update-report-report\\_31-Dec-16.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/170505-IBRC-Progress-update-report-report_31-Dec-16.pdf) . This report covers the period to December 2016 and gives an overview of the work which the Special Liquidators have completed since their appointment in February 2013, the work which is on-going in the liquidation and the tasks which remain to be completed.

## **Budget Submissions**

97. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance his views on farm income averaging whereby either the farmer or spouse have a second income from self-employment; if a threshold can be introduced whereby the income average can apply rather than excluding due to the fact that in some situations it may be a small amount of self employment income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42122/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy may be aware, I have received a number of pre-Budget submissions proposing changes to the operation of income averaging for the farming sector. Consideration of specific proposals with regard to income tax measures relating to the farming sector remain ongoing in the context of Budget 2018 deliberations.

## **Tax Yield**

98. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the income received by each Garda station that has a telecoms mast on site that sublets space on that mast to other companies to use and or take a fixing on for each of the past five years, by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41999/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The following table shows the gross income (excluding VAT) received by the State under licences granted by the Commissioners of Public Works in respect of mobile telecommunications equipment on Garda Masts for each of the 5 years from 2012 – 2016.

**Income from Telecommunication Mast Licences at Garda Stations (GS) - 2012 - 2016**

Location	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Abbeyfeale GS	€12,836	€44,433	€22,251	€15,652	€23,687
Anglesea St GS	€20,085	€22,804	€22,804	€17,367	€32,015
Arklow GS	€9,211	€39,082	€21,850	€12,121	€20,725
Ashbourne GS	€25,643	€30,957	€33,487	€21,504	€39,743
Balbriggan GS	€46,517	€118,710	€68,657	€54,270	€89,640
Ballingarry South GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Ballybunion GS	€10,585	€24,966	€16,292	€9,002	€16,026
Ballycastle GS	€30,873	€16,026	€16,026	€12,484	€23,196
Ballycroy GS	€7,170	€8,963	€8,963	€5,378	€8,963
Ballydesmond GS	€3,500	€8,750	€8,750	€5,250	€8,750
Ballyfermot GS	€17,100	€76,454	€38,783	€14,259	€37,775
Ballyhale GS	€14,506	€16,278	€16,278	€11,595	€15,941
Ballyheigue GS	€15,322	€33,279	€24,707	€17,200	€31,615
Ballyvaughan GS	€7,554	€9,443	€9,443	€5,666	€9,443
Bandon GS	€19,731	€32,554	€27,176	€21,813	€28,394
Belmullet GS	€7,170	€11,054			
Bishopstown GS	€7,193	€14,385	€7,193	€9,590	€9,590
Blacklion GS	€20,204	€19,484	€29,779	€12,801	€23,026
Blackrock (Dn) GS	€17,100	€21,375	€21,375	€12,825	€21,375
Blanchardstown GS	€60,076	€81,893	€73,134	€55,229	€88,617
Blessington GS	€19,718	€26,888	€21,510	€19,718	€30,473
Boyle GS	€29,077	€41,265	€32,489	€30,902	€41,162
Bridewell GS	€47,418	€64,686	€51,568	€42,699	€55,040
Bruff GS	€22,567	€23,160	€23,160	€13,361	€30,048
Bunclody GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Buttevant GS	€13,060	€17,221	€16,026	€9,685	€16,026
Cabinteely GS	€47,725	€65,030	€51,875	€40,865	€55,091
Cabra GS	€64,742	€82,316	€73,503	€55,178	€79,841
Caherciveen GS	€0	€15,844	€7,313	€3,035	€7,085
Campile GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Carickmacross GS	€7,384	€9,230	€9,230	€5,538	€9,230
Carlingford GS	€26,828	€33,850	€28,600	€19,440	€37,196
Carlow GS	€19,887	€20,916	€20,916	€8,423	€20,725
Castlebleney GS	€21,858	€23,629	€23,629	€18,040	€30,366

Questions - Written Answers

Location	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Castlecomer GS	€10,785	€9,244	€9,244	€865	€9,100
Castledermot GS	€8,330	€7,140	€7,140	€152	€7,000
Castleisland GS	€7,085	€30,316	€16,902	€9,371	€16,026
Castletownbere GS	€13,060	€17,149	€15,964	€9,112	€17,798
Cavan GS	€25,439	€34,656	€29,089	€25,319	€37,176
Charleville GS	€14,900	€16,671	€16,671	€5,970	€22,039
Clogherhead GS	€14,340	€16,133	€16,133	€12,548	€23,303
Clonakilty GS	€19,463	€50,548	€28,793	€22,509	€37,196
Clonbullogue GS	€30,873	€16,026	€16,026	€12,484	€23,196
Clondalkin GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750
Clones GS	€19,633	€26,781	€21,404	€19,654	€30,366
Clonroche GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Clontarf GS	€30,581	€41,771	€38,719	€21,840	€37,550
Clontribet GS	€7,170	€8,963	€8,963	€5,378	€8,963
Collooney GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Coolock GS	€29,875	€102,051	€51,315	€36,980	€54,851
Courtown GS	€15,617	€16,169	€16,169	€5,351	€16,026
Croom GS	€15,426	€16,673	€18,799	€13,108	€17,009
Crumlin GS	€19,800	€73,835	€43,154	€24,130	€41,150
Dalkey GS	€16,800	€21,000	€21,000	€12,600	€21,000
Dingle GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Donnybrook GS	€16,400	€20,500	€20,500	€12,300	€20,500
Donoughmore GS	€8,322	€10,403	€10,403	€6,242	€22,950
Drumcollogher GS	€11,970	€17,228	€16,048	€9,949	€16,048
Dun Laoghaire GS	€17,100	€21,375	€21,375	€12,825	€21,375
Dunboyne GS	€26,173	€35,467	€28,476	€22,314	€30,168
Duncannon GS	€19,973	€27,122	€21,744	€18,811	€19,611
Dundalk GS	€18,311	€20,614	€20,614	€16,008	€29,714
Dundrum GS	€16,800	€16,800			
Dunfanaghy GS	€12,918	€8,856	€24,023	€8,424	€17,624
Dungarvan GS	€9,322	€9,322	€9,322	€9,322	€9,322
Dunshaughlin GS	€9,945	€9,945	€9,945	€7,100	€9,322
Easkey GS	€14,255	€16,090	€16,090	€10,800	€16,026
Emyvale GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€10,628
Enfield GS	€7,170	€8,963	€27,005		
Ennis GS	€16,480	€25,843	€18,852	€16,438	€23,554
Enniscorthy GS	€9,322	€11,653	€11,653	€6,992	€11,653
Enniskerry GS	€30,212	€28,108	€30,541	€18,808	€34,475
Eyrecourt GS	€7,000	€8,750	€8,750	€5,250	€8,750
Falcarragh GS	€7,170	€8,963	€8,963	€5,378	€15,543
Fitzgibbon St GS	€49,600	€120,829	€75,864	€60,292	€94,750
Foynes GS	€15,583	€16,140	€16,140	€6,309	€17,798
Galway Mill ST GS	€9,987	€12,484	€12,484	€7,490	€12,484
Garristown GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750

Location	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Glenbeigh GS	€14,340	€16,133	€16,133	€12,548	€23,303
Glenties GS	€19,946	€23,026	€23,026	€17,345	€30,196
Goresbridge GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Gorey GS	€14,559	€22,210	€22,210	€14,952	€21,612
Gort GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Granard GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Greystones GS	€18,311	€20,614	€20,614	€16,008	€29,714
Gurranbraher GS	€26,238	€63,427	€38,878	€31,548	€48,871
Hackballscross GS	€21,870	€7,140	€7,140	€7,140	€7,140
Henry St GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514		
Holycross GS	€18,296	€31,439	€24,371	€12,701	€21,641
Howth GS	€47,218	€64,436	€51,318	€42,549	€54,790
Irishtown GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750
Kells GS	€14,314	€51,216	€26,547	€20,191	€27,133
Kenmare GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Kevin St GS	€18,600	€23,250	€23,250	€13,950	€27,900
Kilcullen GS	€7,170	€7,170	€7,170	€7,170	€1,793
Kildare GS	€11,122	€13,903	€13,903	€8,342	€13,903
Kildorrery GS	€7,085	€10,923			
Kildysart GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Kilgarvan GS	€14,586	€16,358	€16,358	€5,289	€17,798
Kill of the Grange GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750
Killaloe GS	€20,427	€50,247	€30,560	€24,698	€38,785
Killarney GS	€9,100	€11,375	€11,375	€6,825	€11,375
Killimor GS	€12,463	€19,611	€14,234	€12,484	€16,026
Killorglin GS	€14,890	€18,936	€7,421	€6,252	€7,085
Kilmainham GS	€51,558	€56,058	€56,058	€29,797	€71,700
Kilmallock GS	€6,908				
Kilmore Quay GS	€19,951	€44,678	€29,676	€23,660	€37,961
Kilronan GS	€7,085	€10,923			
Kinsale GS	€18,422	€51,818	€30,525	€20,029	€45,029
Letterkenny GS	€25,987	€20,614	€38,912	€17,360	€38,925
Lismore GS	€9,211	€11,513	€11,513	€6,908	€11,513
Listowel GS	€14,170	€14,170	€17,906	€12,110	€15,941
Loughrea GS	€21,505	€30,267	€23,276	€14,591	€25,278
Lucan GS	€62,279	€78,679	€66,379	€59,573	€86,100
Malahide GS	€19,300	€24,125	€24,125	€14,475	€24,125
Manorhamilton GS	€19,718	€26,888	€21,510	€19,718	€30,473
Midleton GS	€14,255	€39,679	€23,496	€15,473	€30,281
Milford GS	€14,085	€23,163	€23,163	€19,350	€20,221
Mitchelstown GS	€16,203	€25,497	€18,505	€16,230	€20,836
Monaghan GS	€25,948	€66,291	€37,922	€25,915	€49,086
Monasterevin GS	€27,547	€35,021	€29,318	€20,725	€37,971
Mountjoy GS	€47,475	€119,951	€69,215	€54,280	€89,151

Questions - Written Answers

Location	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Moville GS	€8,325	€10,406	€10,406	€6,244	€10,406
Mullingar GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Naas GS	€18,843	€21,173	€21,173	€6,935	€20,753
Nenagh GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Omeath GS	€21,663	€23,456	€23,456	€12,504	€30,303
Oughterard GS	€14,417	€16,189	€23,521	€4,159	€15,856
Pallaskenry GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Patrickswell GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€10,628
Pearse St GS	€16,800	€21,000	€21,000	€12,600	€21,000
Phoenix Park GS	€63,419	€80,640	€79,183	€46,684	€69,429
Portlaoise GS	€9,821	€12,276	€12,276	€7,366	€12,276
Raheny GS	€29,746	€96,278	€52,250	€39,376	€54,695
Rathduff GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€10,628
Rathfarnham GS	€16,400	€69,585	€38,904	€21,580	€36,900
Rathkeale GS	€14,758	€16,551	€16,551	€6,015	€16,133
Rathmines GS	€47,569	€64,194	€56,386	€38,574	€46,625
Rathmore GS	€19,633	€42,881	€28,835	€31,923	€30,020
Riverstown GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Ronanstown GS	€17,300	€21,625	€21,625	€12,975	€21,625
Roscarberry GS	€15,438	€16,198	€16,198	€17,436	€8,515
Roscommon GS	€16,492	€18,823	€18,823	€14,162	€25,993
Roxboro GS	€7,982	€9,978	€9,978	€5,987	€9,978
Salthill GS	€9,599	€11,999	€11,999	€7,199	€11,999
Santry GS	€33,000	€37,150	€37,150	€28,850	€53,550
Schull GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Shankill GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750
Shannon GS	€19,985	€22,288	€24,981	€9,765	€21,113
Sixmilebridge GS	€20,315	€24,498	€23,303	€16,918	€30,473
Skibbereen GS	€7,085	€32,225	€16,236	€8,229	€15,856
Slane GS	€21,578	€23,350	€23,350	€12,440	€30,196
Sligo GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Sneem GS	€14,595	€16,367	€16,367	€11,641	€16,026
Stepaside GS	€47,322	€123,992	€69,395	€60,029	€89,446
Store St GS	€17,100	€21,375	€21,375	€12,825	€28,350
Summerhill GS	€19,722	€26,807	€21,493	€12,355	€22,941
Sundrive Rd GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750
Swanlinbar GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Swinford GS	€7,170	€25,072	€16,398	€9,341	€16,133
Swords GS	€16,600	€20,750	€20,750	€12,450	€20,750
Tallaght GS	€50,297	€54,397	€54,397	€40,853	€64,233
Templemore GS	€18,181	€23,750	€23,750	€18,324	€23,454
Terenure GS	€29,682	€47,064	€33,782	€30,009	€38,209
Thomastown GS	€8,498	€7,284	€7,284	€681	€7,170
Thurles GS	€18,743	€21,046	€21,046	€14,939	€20,614



Location	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Tinahely GS	€31,204	€40,922	€33,507	€24,376	€42,740
Tipperary Town GS	€5,975	€8,292	€7,108	€3,558	€7,170
Tralee GS	€9,211	€11,514	€11,514	€6,908	€11,514
Tramore GS	€18,533	€20,836	€20,836	€16,230	€30,158
Tullow GS	€7,085	€8,856	€8,856	€5,314	€8,856
Waterford GS	€36,766	€46,642	€40,232	€27,392	€51,074
Waterville GS	€24,524	€30,317	€23,334	€18,674	€25,522
Wexford GS	€7,000	€8,750	€8,750	€5,250	€8,750
Whitehall GS	€33,500	€83,940	€54,975	€42,453	€71,100
Wicklow GS	€7,085	€3,543	€8,851		
Woodford GS	€21,425	€16,026	€16,026	€12,277	€23,196
Youghal GS	€15,186	€19,806	€18,622	€10,707	€18,684

### Office of Public Works Properties

99. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the closed Garda stations that have been repurposed for another use by location and by the nature of their use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42001/17]

**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 an alternative use has been identified for the following former Garda stations since 2012:

Assigned for Community Use (12)

No.	Name of Property and Location	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, Kilgarvan, Co. Kerry	Kilgarvan Tidy Towns.
9.	Former Garda Station, Kilmeedy, Co. Limerick	Kilmeedy Community Development Group.
10.	Former Garda Station, Mulranny, Co. Mayo	Mulranny Community Futures Association.

No.	Name of Property and Location	Community Group
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.

Properties Retained or Under Consideration for Alternative State use (8)

No.	Name of Property and Location	Alternative State Use
1.	Former Garda Station, Barrack Street, Cork	Cork City Council
2.	Former Garda Station, Harcourt Terrace, Dublin	Department of Education and Skills for the construction of a new primary School.
3.	Former Garda Station, Kill, Co. Kildare	South West Kildare Partnership
4.	Former Garda Station, Loughlynn, Co. Roscommon	HSE for an Ambulance Base
5.	Former Garda Station, Mary Street, Limerick	Limerick City and County Council
6.	Former Garda Station, Shanaglish, Galway	National Monuments Depot
7.	Former Garda Station, Valentia Island, Co. Kerry	Irish Coastguard
8.	Former Garda Station, Whitehall, Dublin	State Pathologist and Dublin City Coroner.

### Office of Public Works Properties

100. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works obtained recent updated valuations for the closed Garda stations it has responsibility for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42003/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) has not obtained recent valuations for the Garda stations, which closed as part of the Rationalisation Programme 2012-2013.

Should the OPW decide to dispose of any closed Garda stations, current market valuations will be obtained at that juncture.

### Office of Public Works Properties

101. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works has put a hold on its plans to sell the remaining Garda stations that have been closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42004/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** In August 2016, the Office of Public Works was requested by An Garda Síochána not to dispose of the Garda station properties that remained in State ownership until the review of closed Garda stations had concluded.

## Office of Public Works

102. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures to be taken by the OPW in relation to a river (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42046/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** An inspection of the river channel running through Cappamore was completed earlier this year and no maintenance works were proposed in this area. A further inspection of the channel will be undertaken to determine if maintenance works are required.

## Pension Provisions

103. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when persons (details supplied) will receive benefits under the Garda spouse and children scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42071/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department in liaison with the Department of Justice & Equality is currently processing this particular appeal application. It is expected that a decision will be made shortly on the appeal and this outcome will be conveyed to the persons concerned by the Department of Justice & Equality.

## Public Procurement Regulations

104. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if semi-State bodies are obliged to give tenders to Irish companies if prices are comparative with foreign companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42097/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Public procurement is the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. National rules governing public procurement must comply with the relevant EU, WTO and national legal requirements and obligations. Under EU law, public contracts above a certain value must be advertised EU-wide and awarded to the most competitive tender in an open and objective process. The aim of European and national rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds of location or nationality and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

My colleague, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan, launched the Office of Government Procurement's (OGP) Public Service Spend and Tender Analysis Report for 2015 report in September. This is the OGP's third annual report that analyses expenditure and tendering activity on goods, services and minor works across public service bodies in Ireland. I would point out that the analysis is encouraging, indicating that 94% of the State's expenditure is with firms within the State.

Finally, it is also important to remember that open tendering is a two way street and that it provides Irish companies with opportunities to compete abroad. Public expenditure on goods,

works, and services representing approximately 14% of EU GDP with an annual value of nearly €2 trillion. The open market regime offers opportunities for Irish companies to win business abroad and reliable EU studies indicate that many Irish businesses are successful in this regard.

### **Fire Safety Regulations**

105. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has satisfied himself that fire safety regulations have been met for the absolute safety of the pupils and staff at a school (details supplied) in view of his Department's recent announcement to carry out fire safety audits at an additional 31 schools, all built in recent years by a company at the centre of fire safety breaches identified at another six schools. [41989/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Principal and the Board of Management for the school to which the Deputy refers have not raised any concerns with my Department with regard to fire safety in its existing accommodation.

The Deputy will also be aware that a major school building project to provide completely new accommodation for the school is at an advanced stage of the architectural planning process. My Department has recently informed the Board of Management for the school that it can proceed to the tender stage to appoint a Building Contractor to complete the project.

### **Schools Building Projects**

106. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a building project will be examined with a view to having the works completed in view of the fact progress on the project appears to be slow (details supplied). [41990/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The building project referred to by the Deputy has been devolved to Cork Education and Training Board (ETB) for delivery.

I understand there are some difficulties with the project on site but these are being dealt with by the ETB within the terms and conditions of the Public Works Contract with a view to having the building project completed as soon as possible.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

107. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) will be placed on the correct pay scale which they are seeking since 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42018/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The service history of the person referred to by the Deputy has been reviewed by my Department. She is entitled to progress to Point 9 on the salary scale w.e.f. 22nd June, 2017. Salary will be adjusted for the pay issue of 19th October, 2017 and arrears due will be paid. All other salary adjustments have been applied previously. A letter outlining the full progression of her incremental salary shall issue to the person referred to, in the next few days.

### **School Transport**

108. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review correspondence (details supplied); if refunds will be issued; if an additional service will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42075/17]

**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.

Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are generally eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest school.

Where families are not eligible for school transport they may apply on a concessionary basis only. Concessionary transport is subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge. Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

The availability of concessionary transport may vary from year to year, is not available on public scheduled services and cannot be guaranteed for the duration of a child's post primary school education cycle.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that the refunds in question have been processed.

### **School Curriculum**

109. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to develop the SPHE curriculum to ensure it is as inclusive and diverse as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42078/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Social, Personal and 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 also available to schools.

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.

As the new Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) is rolled out, schools should ensure that the junior cycle programme they design addresses the principles, statements of learning and key skills that relate to the areas currently covered in SPHE. This can be achieved through continuing to provide the existing SPHE course, providing a short course in SPHE or other approaches.

The Framework for Junior Cycle additionally provides for a new area of learning at ju-



nior cycle called Wellbeing. Wellbeing will cross the three years of junior cycle and build on substantial work already taking place in schools in support of students' wellbeing. This area of learning will make the school's culture and ethos and commitment to wellbeing visible to students. It will include learning opportunities to enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students. It will enable students to build life skills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and to their community. The Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme begins with 300 hours of timetabled engagement in 2017 and will build up to 400 hours by 2020 as the new junior cycle is implemented fully in schools.

### **Fire Safety**

110. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to undertake a fire safety audit of all schools and buildings under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42079/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that on 26th September my Department announced that it will be putting in a place a comprehensive package of measures to ensure fire safety measures in schools meet best practice.

Ensuring the safety of all those who work and learn in our schools is a main priority of the Department of Education and Skills.

These measures are being undertaken as an added precaution by my Department, following on from consultation with stakeholders after recent concerns at home and abroad regarding fire safety in public buildings.

It is important to note that the Department does not believe that there are issues regarding fire safety with schools generally, rather these measures are being taken in order to take an abundance of caution approach in this area.

Firstly, the Department will appoint a fire safety expert to undertake a complete audit of all school buildings constructed by Western Building Systems (WBS). This follows on from the identification of a number of issues in respect of the compliance by a number of schools constructed by WBS with their fire safety certificates. My Department, at this stage, does not have any reason to believe that there are any fire safety issues in respect of any of the other buildings built by Western Building Systems. These audits are a proactive measure being taken, following on from consultation with stakeholders, to satisfy the Department that there are no further issues with school buildings constructed by that company. It is anticipated that this will take approximately 6 months to complete this number of audits. However, in each case, the Department will require an early report from the Fire Safety Consultants conducting the audit if any issue of significant concern is discovered.

Further to this and as previously announced, my Department is in the process of commissioning fire safety audits of a representative sample of up to 25 schools constructed over the last 20 years. It should be noted that each school building is already required to have and comply with a fire certificate awarded at time of construction by the local authority.

It is important to note that the selection of a school to be included in the sample for this audit in no way means that my Department has concerns about that particular school. Regarding the timeline for this sample audit, it is expected to be concluded by January 2018. The tender for the appointment of fire safety consultants will be completed by the mid October. It is expected that the first set of Fire Safety Audit Reports will be provided to my Department by the end of December 2017.

4 October 2017

My Department will also contact the representative Professional Associations, principally the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland ((RIAI), Engineer's Ireland (IEI) and the Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI) to discuss the operation of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (2014) to re-iterate the responsibilities of Design Teams to fully engage in a complete and comprehensive way with the inspection and certification requirements of BC(A)R (2014). It is the responsibility of the Design Team appointed to build a school to ensure that a newly constructed building is compliant with its Fire Certificate. My Department is writing to these associations to remind them of their members' legal duties in this regard.

My Department has also written to all Design Teams working on buildings currently under construction to remind them of their responsibilities to ensure that all buildings comply with fire certificates awarded by the local authority

My Department will also issue a new Circular to all schools bringing the attention of the school authorities to their obligations in relation to Fire Safety management protocols. Detailed guidance documents are already in place to advise schools on managing Health and Safety in schools that includes comprehensive advice on the issue of managing the risk of fire.

My Department will, going forward, appoint a Clerk of Works to all future major building projects to enhance the oversight and inspection of works when they are being carried out. This person, who will be appointed by the Department of Education and Skills, will provide an extra layer of checking and oversight during the construction process.

Additionally, an internal fire safety committee is being established within my Department. This group will be made up of both technical and administrative staff, and will monitor any patterns arising from day to day interactions with schools, the results from the various audits and their own recent experience to shape any further action in this regard.

Finally, under a new protocol from now on, when my Department receives a fire audit report which demonstrates issues in a building regarding fire safety, my Department will immediately notify the school's Patron Body, the school's Board of Management and the Fire Officer in the relevant Local Authority.

These audits and actions will inform any further action which may be required by my Department to ensure that they are satisfied with the fire safety measures in place to protect schools.

My Department will contact the Chief Fire Officers Association to inform them of the above steps which are being taken. A new protocol will also be put in place to keep them up to date with any further developments in this area.

It is worth noting again that my Department has no reason to believe that there are issues with fire safety provisions in schools generally. These additional steps are an added precaution being taken by the Department, prompted by recent concerns in Ireland and abroad regarding fire safety in public buildings.

## **School Funding**

111. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the capitation grant to primary schools will be increased to bring it in line with that provided to post-primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42080/17]

**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.

### **Pupil Data Collection**

112. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in primary schools in the Navan school catchment area; the number of secondary school places that exist in the town; and the planned numbers in both sectors for each of the next five years. [42120/17]

**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 the Navan school planning area, there are 20 primary schools with a total enrolment for the 2016/17 school year of 6,184 primary pupils and 5 post-primary schools with a total enrolment for the 2016/17 school year of 3,385 post-primary students.

My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of the additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity with a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school(s).

My Department is currently carrying out demographic exercises on school planning areas nationwide, including the Navan school planning area, 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.

### **Human Rights Cases**

113. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the security situation of persons (details supplied); his views on these cases and the use of criminal charges to obstruct the work of human rights defenders; and if he will raise the issue with his Honduran counterpart. [42019/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers, as well as of the difficult situation which currently pertains for human rights defenders in Honduras more generally. While Ireland does not have diplomatic representation in Honduras, officials at my Department raise issues relating to human rights in Honduras both at EU and UN level, including through direct contact with the EU Delegation in Tegucigalpa.

Honduras was last reviewed under the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism in May 2015. Ireland intervened on that occasion to express its concern at the climate of violence and insecurity in which human rights defenders operate in Honduras, and asked that adequate financial and human resources be allocated by the Honduran authorities to ensure the implementation of legislation protecting human rights defenders and journalists.

I support the call made by the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour, following a visit to Honduras in July of this year, for increased protection for human rights defenders in Honduras.

In keeping with Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, we will continue to raise concerns regarding threats to the work of human rights defenders in discussions on Honduras at EU and international level.

### **Northern Ireland**

114. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on negotiations in Northern Ireland. [41861/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government is determined, as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to do everything in our power to ensure that all of its institutions are operating effectively, including the devolved Assembly and power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland and the North-South Ministerial Council.

I remain in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, on how both Governments can best continue to support and encourage the parties in achieving that essential objective. We spoke most recently on 2 October and agreed that some progress is being made in the current discussions between the parties. In the first instance, the two largest parties whose mandates entitle them to nominate a First and deputy First Minister need to reach an agreement to form an Executive. In this context, I have welcomed the sustained engagement between the DUP and Sinn Féin over the last number of weeks. In my ongoing contacts with the parties, I have encouraged them to continue this engagement to achieve a

resolution that will allow the devolved institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and the North South Ministerial Council to start operating again.

In the period ahead, I will continue to work with the Secretary of State and the political parties in Northern Ireland to support an agreement on the formation of a new power-sharing Executive for Northern Ireland within the mandate of the current Assembly.

### **Residency Permits**

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41992/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned submitted an application on 28 September 2015 under the Free Movement of Persons Regulations 2015 to be treated as a Permitted Family Member of an EU Citizen. The application was refused on 17 December 2016 as the person failed to meet the criteria.

I am further informed that the person concerned requested a review of the decision on 12 January 2017. The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt with in chronological order. I understand the application is currently being processed and INIS expects to be in a position to issue a decision by the end of November 2017.

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.

### **Criminal Prosecutions**

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an investigation took place into the intervention by a person (details supplied) into a case which led to that case's collapse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42037/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The role of the Office of the State Pathologist is to provide independent expert advice on matters relating to forensic pathology, which may be used in the prosecution of offences such as homicides. The Office is independent in the operation of its functions, which is entirely right and proper in light of the very important role it plays in the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes.

As Minister for Justice and Equality, I do not have any role in relation to criminal trials such as the one referred to, the prosecution of which is a matter for the DPP, and the management of which is a matter for our independent Courts system. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment further on this matter.

### **Legal Services Regulation**



117. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority; the timeframe for the implementation of the various functions for the authority as set down in legislation; the number of statutory instruments which will be forthcoming; his views on concerns that arise with respect to staffing and the delivery of independent and effective regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42042/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the Legal Services Regulatory Authority is an independent statutory body and that I do not, as Minister, have a role in relation to its day to day operations. That independence has been purposefully conferred on the Authority by the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015. This includes in the nomination of the Authority's membership by prescribed bodies, in its statutory objectives and in the independent performance of its functions. I have every confidence, therefore, in the Authority's ability to regulate independently and effectively.

The setting-up of the Authority has been underway since July 2016. At that time Parts 1 and 2 of the Legal Services Regulation Act were commenced as necessary to get the new Authority underway, particularly in terms of its nomination and appointment with the necessary motions of approval of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Authority has convened regularly since its inaugural meeting on 26 October 2016 and makes minutes of its meetings available on its website *www.LSRA.ie*.

In tandem with the ongoing and essential work leading to the Authority starting up its key complaints and regulatory functions, the Authority has been deeply engaged in the conduct of public consultations and in the making of reports on a series of issues which it has been obliged to complete within strictly set deadlines running from its day of establishment on 1 October 2016. For example, in December 2016, sections 118, 119 and 120 of Part 8 of the 2015 Act were commenced to enable the conduct of public consultations and reports by the new Regulatory Authority within the set statutory periods concerned. These relate to Legal Partnerships (between solicitors and barristers and barristers and barristers - solicitors can already operate in partnerships), Multi-Disciplinary Practices (where legal practitioners can provide their services together with other non-legal services providers) and certain restrictions on the work of barristers.

On 31 March 2017 the Regulatory Authority presented its report under section 118 on Legal Partnerships which was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 28 April 2017 and a further short report on the same issue submitted by the Authority on 31 July 2017 is in the course of being laid before the Houses.

On 31 March 2017 the Authority also presented its initial report under section 119 of the Act in relation to Multi-Disciplinary Practices which was laid before the Houses on 28 April 2017. Following its conduct of the relevant public consultations the Authority has submitted a final report on this issue on 29 September 2017 which will, as required, be laid before the Houses.

On 6 April 2017, the Authority commenced its public consultations under section 120 of the 2015 Act about certain restrictions on the work of barristers. These arise with regard to the holding of clients' monies and to the direct provision of services to a client in relation to contentious matters. The Authority submitted its report following these consultations on 29 September 2017 which is in the course of being laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Deputy will also wish to note that the Legal Services Regulatory Authority submitted its first Annual Report under the Act on 26 April 2017 which was duly laid before each House of the Oireachtas on 18 May 2016. The Authority also makes such reports available, as appropriate and when laid before the Houses, on its website.

Having delivered these key reporting obligations the current working focus is very much on the managed roll-out of the Authority's remaining functions with the matching development of its organisational capacities and office and staffing resources which are essential to effective delivery. Following these steps, the key structural reforms of Part 6 of the 2015 Act relating to public complaints, professional conduct and the appointment of the Legal Practitioners' Disciplinary Tribunal dealing with both solicitors and barristers, will be commenced. Members of the public will no longer make complaints about alleged professional misconduct by legal practitioners through the legal professional bodies as happens at present, but rather through the independent Regulatory Authority.

In a key development the Authority has, this summer, completed its public recruitment and appointment of a full-time Chief Executive. It has also recently secured larger office premises in support of the coming into operation of its respective functions. This will also facilitate the Authority in appointing and determining the duties of further staff under sections 25 and 26 of the 2015 Act with the relevant approvals of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. As with earlier commencements made under the 2015 Act, Statutory Instruments will issue as appropriate to the relevant sections or Parts of the Act concerned.

I and my Department continue to work closely with the Authority to enable it to come into substantive regulatory mode at the earliest opportunity. The phased start-up of its various functions will continue to need careful project management. It will also require the ongoing identification, in conjunction with the Authority, of the more specific delivery dates for the respective independent functions involved during the remainder of this year and into 2018. These are matters in relation to which I expect greater detail to become available soon.

### **Subsidiary Protection Applications Data**

118. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons waiting for a first instance decision on a protection application from the International Protection Office; the average amount of time it is taking to get a first instance decision on a protection application from the office; the average amount of time to get an oral interview after lodging a protection application with the office; the number of refugee, subsidiary protection and permission to remain applications granted since 1 January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42043/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the International Protection Act 2015 was commenced on 31 December 2016 (commencement date). The 2015 Act introduced a single procedure which enables all grounds for seeking international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) or permission to remain in the State for other reasons to be examined and determined in one process.

At the end of September 2017, there were some 4,950 applications awaiting processing in the International Protection Office (IPO). The vast majority of these applications were made before the commencement of the 2015 Act but were not finalised by the former Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) by that date. These applications must be processed by the IPO under the transitional provisions of the 2015 Act. Various categories of cases reverted to the IPO including asylum appeals transferred from the old Refugee Appeals Tribunal and asylum and subsidiary protection cases transferred from the old ORAC. This added significantly to the IPO's caseload.

In terms of processing, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that considerable progress has been made by the IPO in getting the new single procedure process up and running. This fol-

lows IPO staff concentrating in the initial months of the year on the necessary preparatory work including issuing correspondence to all transitional applicants with details of the new processing arrangements, the handling of some 2,600 returned Application for International Protection Questionnaires including the translation of questionnaires (some 50% of which require translation) and the scheduling of interviews etc. Furthermore, extensive training on the new procedures and processing arrangements has been delivered to staff in the IPO and supporting panel members (persons with legal qualifications who support International Protection Officers in their function).

To date, the IPO has also conducted almost 1,900 single procedure interviews (including in respect of EU Relocation cases) and 69 interviews under the 2013 Subsidiary Protection Regulations. More than 160 additional interviews have been scheduled in the IPO for the coming weeks with more interviews being scheduled on a daily basis.

A total of 463 grants for protection have issued this year to 19th September, comprising 325 granted refugee status under the Single Procedure and a further 69 legacy applicants were granted refugee status under the Refugee Act, 1996. In addition, 54 grants of Subsidiary Protection under the legacy procedures were made. A further 15 humanitarian permissions to remain were granted by the International Protection Office.

At the present time, it is not possible to calculate an accurate current median processing time for international protection applications due to the different case types on hands which were returned to the IPO under the transition provisions in the 2015 Act. Considerable additional resources, have and are, being allocated to the IPO to assist it in undertaking its statutory functions with a view to processing the volume of cases on hands as soon as possible.

In relation to the scheduling of interviews and the processing of cases in the IPO, I am also advised that the prioritisation of international protection applications is provided for in the International Protection Act 2015 subject to the need for fairness and efficiency. When the Application for International Protection Questionnaire (IPO 2) and other supporting documentation is returned by applicants, the IPO is scheduling applications for interview primarily on the basis of date of application (oldest cases first). However, certain categories of applicant are also being prioritised such as those from refugee generating countries (such as Syria) and unaccompanied minors. The IPO's approach to prioritisation has been agreed with the UNHCR and is available on its website: [www.ipo.gov.ie](http://www.ipo.gov.ie).

### **Court Poor Box**

119. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the use of the court poor box for penalty point offences in view of the fact that it is still happening in some courts despite a High Court ruling in February 2014 against the practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42063/17]

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

Questions - Written Answers

My Department has made enquiries of the Courts Service in the matter and the following table sets out by District the number of persons who received the Poor Box for penalty point offences from Jan 2015 to 30 September 2017. The Deputy will note from the table that the number of persons who received the Poor Box for penalty point offences for 2016 (258) represented a reduction of 70% approx. on the 2015 position (843).

District NO	Court Area	Jan - Dec 2015	Jan - Dec 2016	Jan - Sept 2017
1	AN CLOCHAN LIATH	1		
District No 1 Total		1		
2	BALLYSHAN- NON	10	1	
	CARRICK ON SHANNON	23	3	2
	DONEGAL	4	3	
	MANORHAMIL- TON	2		
	SLIGO	70	3	1
	TUBBERCURRY	4	1	
District No 2 Total		113	11	3
3	Castlebar		1	
District No. 3 Total			1	
	Ballinasloe		5	1
4	LOUGHREA	2	6	6
	STROKESTOWN			1
	ROSCOMMON	1		
	TUAM	4	3	6
District No 4 Total		7	14	14
5	CARRICK- MACROSS	5		
	CAVAN	8	2	
	MONAGHAN	3		
	VIRGINIA	12	2	
District No 5 Total		28	4	
6	ARDEE		2	
	DROGHEDA			8
6	DUNDALK	1		8
District No 6 Total		1	2	16
7	GALWAY		3	6
District No 7 Total			3	6

District NO	Court Area	Jan - Dec 2015	Jan - Dec 2016	Jan - Sept 2017
	TIPPERARY		1	
District No. 8 Total			1	
9	ATHLONE	3	1	3
	LONGFORD	1		
	MULLINGAR	7	4	2
District No 9 Total		11	5	5
12	GORT		1	
12	ENNIS	2		
	KILRUSH	1		
District No 12 Total		3	1	
15	PORTLAOISE	33	7	
	TULLAMORE	17		
District No 15 Total		50	7	
16	BRAY			1
District No. 16 Total				1
17	AN DAINGEAN	1	1	3
	KENMARE	2	1	2
	KILLARNEY	8	3	2
	KILLORGLIN	4	1	2
	LISTOWEL	2	5	3
	TRALEE	23	5	9
District No 17 Total		40	16	21
18	BANDON	15	8	1
	BANTRY	7	1	
	CLONAKILTY	2	1	
	MACROOM	47	5	1
	SKIBBEREEN	1		1
District No 18 Total		72	15	3
20	FERMOY	64		1
	MALLOW	104	1	3
District No 20 Total		168	1	4
21	CARRICK ON SUIR	8	7	9
	CASHEL	4		1
	CLONMEL	3	2	2
	DUNGARVAN	71	53	32
	LISMORE	10	7	6



District NO	Court Area	Jan - Dec 2015	Jan - Dec 2016	Jan - Sept 2017
	YOUGHAL	6	4	1
District No 21 Total		102	73	51
22	CARLOW	26		
	KILKENNY	9		
District No 22 Total		35		
23	GOREY	4		
District No 23 Total		4		
24	WATERFORD CITY	28	8	3
District No 24 Total		28	8	3
25	NAAS	4	1	
District No 25 Total		4	1	
DMD	DUBLIN MET- ROPOLITAN DISTRICT	176	95	96
DMD Total		176	95	96
Total		843	258	223

The Deputy will also be aware that in February 2014, the Government approved the drafting of a Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill to replace the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 with modern provisions dealing with community sanctions and the role of the Probation Service in the criminal justice system. The Bill is currently being drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

It is intended that the legislation will abolish the court poor box and replace it with a statutory Reparation Fund to provide for a fair, equitable and transparent system of reparation that will apply only to minor offences dealt with by the District Court.

### Referendum Data

120. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the commitment the Government has given on holding referendums on blasphemy, women in the home and divorce. [41643/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** On 26 September, the Government agreed an indicative timetable for a number of referendums on constitutional amendments, mainly arising from the work of the Citizens' Assembly, the Convention on the Constitution, and the Programme for a Partnership Government.

Under this timetable and subject to passage of Bills by the Houses of the Oireachtas and formal confirmation of the polling date, it is proposed to hold referendums in October 2018 on the offence of blasphemy (Article 40.6.1) and regarding a woman's life within the home (Article 41.2), and in June 2019 on a proposal to reduce the length of the period or periods for which a

couple must live apart before they can obtain a divorce (Article 41.3.2).

The amendments on blasphemy and women in the home arise from Reports of the Convention on the Constitution and are also promised in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

With Government approval, I propose to present the Bills to amend the Constitution on these matters in good time so that these referendums can be held as planned.

In regard to divorce, the Government decided to support the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Divorce) Bill 2016, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Deputy Josepha Madigan. The Bill completed Committee Stage in the Dáil on 12 July. I am currently considering the issues raised by Deputies at the Committee Stage debate on the Bill and I will bring proposals to Government in that regard in due course.

### **Garda Data**

121. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of incidents since 2007 in which sums of money, confiscated money or evidence in a case were found to be missing, stolen or lost from a Garda station by the amount of missing, stolen or lost money involved, the date it was reported and the Garda station involved. [42113/17]

**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 the report is to hand.

### **Firearms Theft**

122. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and type of firearms, ammunition and related items reported stolen or lost in each of the years 2014 to 2016; and the reason these figures were excluded from the 2015 and 2016 annual reviews of the operation of the Firearms Acts. [42114/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I have asked the Garda Commissioner for report on this matter and I will write to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

### **Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children**

123. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of unaccompanied minors that have been relocated here under the refugee protection programme in each of the past 12 months; the country of origin of each; the date on which they were relocated here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42127/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As I said in Dáil Éireann on 28 September 2017 when I spoke during the Statements on the Report by the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality on Immigration, Asylum and the Refugee Crisis, the Government is committed to providing protection to those who are most vulnerable. Priority is given to family groups and unaccompanied children. Following the adoption last November of the All-Party Motion on the Calais Unaccompanied Minors, concerted efforts have been made to provide a pathway here for such unaccompanied minors as wished to come

to Ireland. My colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone T.D., established the Calais Special Project within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Working directly with the French authorities, any unaccompanied minors who have been identified as suitable for relocation here have been accepted and provided with the appropriate supports. No unaccompanied minor who has asked to come to Ireland has been refused. In total, 26 young persons have been relocated to-date. 23 are currently in the care of Tusla and the remainder have been reunited with family members already living in Ireland. Family tracing and reunification processes are underway for those who remain unaccompanied. I understand that further arrivals are expected under the Calais Special Project and I wish to commend all those involved in the Project for their commitment to implementing this most important commitment.

In addition, Tusla, which has statutory responsibility for the care of unaccompanied minors, has agreed to take up to 20 unaccompanied minors under the EU relocation programme. To date, six unaccompanied minors, under the stricter Irish definition, have been relocated from Greece but there are relatively few unaccompanied minors available in the cohort of nationalities eligible for the relocation.

Efforts continue to seek further transfers within this cohort and it is hoped that further unaccompanied minors may arrive from Greece. In this context it is worth noting that in its most recent report on relocation and resettlement, the European Commission specifically welcomed the actions taken by Ireland in respect of unaccompanied minors. However, despite all Ireland's efforts it has proven extraordinarily difficult to find unaccompanied minors in Greece within the cohort eligible for relocation.

All strands of the IRPP have had a strong focus on families and children and almost half of the admissions to-date have been minors, with almost 85% of this figure aged under 12.

The numbers, date of arrival and nationality of the unaccompanied minors are set out in the following table.

**Table of admission of UAMs**

Arrival Month in Ireland	Country from which Relocated	Number
October 2016	Greece	1
December 2016	Greece	3
January 2017	France	2
March 2017	France	19
April 2017	Greece	2
June 2017	France	1
August 2017	France	1
September 2017	France	3
Total		32

The original country of origin of the 32 unaccompanied minors is as follows:

Afghanistan: 15

South Sudan: 4

Eritrea: 6

Syria: 7

Total: 32

## Wildlife Control

124. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has been liaising with local authorities regarding the culling of seagulls in Dublin city; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42126/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The EU Birds Directive allows Member States to make derogations from its protective measures in respect of certain wild bird species in certain circumstances – for example, where they are causing damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health and safety or to air safety. In Ireland, Declarations in this regard are renewed annually.

The current Declaration, which is effective from 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018, includes methods to control seagull species in the Balbriggan area for public safety reasons which may involve the removal of eggs and nests only.

Finally, my Department does not have a role in undertaking the activities permitted under the Declaration. I would point out that the culling of seagulls is not permitted and I have not been liaising with local authorities in this regard.

## Disabilities Data

125. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with intellectual disabilities under 65 years of age that live in nursing homes in County Wexford. [41395/17]

**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

126. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be admitted to hospital for a procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41996/17]

**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.

### **Hospitals Capital Programme**

127. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he held discussions with a hospital (details supplied) in respect of proposals to help build capacity at the facility into the future; the schedule being followed in respect of consideration of the matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42000/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Tallaght Hospital recently provided my Department with an overview of the major capital projects that are in progress and the major capital projects that are planned at the hospital.

Future capital investment in hospitals must be considered within the overall acute hospital sector infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place.

### **Hospital Consultant Contracts**

128. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that one of the three surgeons in Portiuncula hospital is possibly seeking an official transfer to University Hospital Galway (details supplied); the person that signed off on same; and his views on whether this is a downgrading of services at Portiuncula hospital. [42009/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Overcrowding**

129. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reopen the 20 closed beds in St. John's hospital, Limerick to help alleviate the overcrowding problem in university hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42023/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Occupational Therapy**

130. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if an occupational therapist report for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42033/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct



reply.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

131. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a re-evaluation will be carried out on the drug Kuvan for persons with PKU under the reimbursement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42039/17]

132. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if he will make the drug Kuvan, also known as sapropterin, for the treatment of those effected by phenylketonuria here; and when persons may avail of this treatment. [42040/17]

142. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Kuvan will be made available for the treatment of PKU (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42076/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 131, 132 and 142 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by the HSE, including, for example, advice from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

Sapropterin (Kuvan) was previously considered under the national pricing and reimbursement processes in 2009. At that time insufficient evidence was available to support the pricing and reimbursement application submitted by Merck Serono for Kuvan.

In December 2015 Merck Serono advised the HSE that the market authorisation for Kuvan was transferring to Biomarin in 2016. The HSE met with the new market authorisation holder Biomarin in May 2016 and was advised that it would be submitting a health technology assessment dossier in relation to Kuvan.

The NCPE assessment of the Biomarin dossier was completed on the 15 September 2017 and the NCPE did not recommend Kuvan for reimbursement as it was not deemed cost effective.

The HSE assessment process is ongoing and the HSE will take into account the expert advice of the NCPE when making its decision, in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

133. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42047/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, is the responsibility of the Minister for

Children and Youth Affairs. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs introduced the AIM model of supports to facilitate the full participation of children with a disability in the ECCE Programme. The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) provides supports including enhanced continuing professional development for early years practitioners; grants for equipment, appliances and minor alterations; and access to therapeutic intervention.

It is the AIM policy that requests for equipment or appliances will only be accepted from healthcare professionals (such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist) working for or on behalf of the HSE. This reflects the holistic, integrated approach recommended in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group, whereby services and supports would be prescribed and provided in a joined-up, child-centered way by a multi-disciplinary HSE team, i.e. it should support a situation where the same team is assessing and considering the child's needs across the home, pre-school and other settings. This approach also takes account of important guiding principles of equity and 'needs-driven' which underpin the model, i.e. access to supports under the model should not be affected by ability to pay.

However I understand that an application was requested under AIM Level 7 - requesting funding for additional support, and this was approved. DCYA have also requested that the application should be diverted to the HSE under AIM Level 6 - HSE Therapy Supports, in order that this child may be assessed for any equipment that may be deemed essential for his participation in the ECCE pre-school room.

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

### **General Medical Services Scheme**

134. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42048/17]

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

### **Health Services Provision**

135. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the family are in the process of seeking medical attention in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42049/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Health Service Capacity Review**

136. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited with an organisation for a person (details supplied) that has been on the waiting list for two years. [42052/17]

**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**

137. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the number of business cases in County Clare being held for persons with intellectual disabilities that require emergency residential placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42056/17]

**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 HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Road Traffic Accidents Data**

138. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to combine the data on road traffic collision casualties held by hospitals and general practitioners; the status of the reporting of serious injuries from road traffic collisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42062/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As data on road traffic collisions is not routinely maintained by General Practitioners it would not be possible to combine the data as suggested by the Deputy. I understand that officials from my Department have contacted the Deputy's office seeking additional information regarding the second part of his question.

### **Mental Health Services**

139. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the commitment in the programme for Government to develop services and specialties to support persons with mental health difficulties; and if he will further report on the commitment to implement the national dementia strategy. [41862/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The Programme for Partnership Government gives a clear commitment to increasing the mental health budget annually, as resources allow, to expand existing services. Since 2012, the overall gross non-capital health budget for the HSE has been increased from €711 million to over €850 million in 2017. This is an increase of €140 million over this period.

Key priorities to be addressed in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan include youth mental health, further improvement to child & adolescent (CAMHS) and adult services, older people's services and further enhanced out of hours response for those in need of urgent services.

The increased investment in mental health services over the last number of years has helped to facilitate an increase in the number and staffing levels of both Adult and Children & Adolescent Community Mental Health Teams. Of the additional 1,550 new mental health posts approved since 2012, some 1,150 have been, or are in the process of being recruited.

Construction has started on the new 120-bed hospital to replace the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum, along with a new 10-bed forensic CAMHS unit and a new 10-bed Mental Health Intellectual Disability Unit. The new National Forensic Mental Health facility is due to become operational in early 2020.

Counselling services across both primary and secondary care have also been developed, including the provision of three new Jigsaw youth mental health services in Cork (2 sites), Dublin (2 sites) and Limerick (1 site). In addition, funding has been provided for the recruitment of an additional 22 psychologist posts and 114 assistant psychology posts in primary care. These posts were advertised recently.

The Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014, with the objective of increasing awareness, ensuring early diagnosis and intervention and developing enhanced community based services.

In parallel with the Strategy, the Department of Health and the HSE have agreed a joint initiative with the Atlantic Philanthropies to implement significant elements of the Strategy over the period 2014-2017. This Implementation Programme represents a combined investment of €27.5 million, with the Atlantic Philanthropies contributing €12 million and the HSE €15.5 million.

Funding of €1.23 million has recently been secured under the 2017 Dormant Accounts Action Plan to support a number of dementia projects. These include post-diagnostic supports, dementia friendly communities, assistive technology libraries and further exploratory work on the development of a national dementia registry. These measures will help people with dementia to live well in their communities for as long as possible.

The Department and the HSE are working on a mid-term review of the implementation of the National Dementia Strategy which will identify the achievements so far and set out the further work that is required to implement the Strategy over the next 12 months and beyond. The resources required for the ongoing implementation of the Strategy can only be considered in the context of the Estimates and Budget process. The mid-term review will assist in identifying further actions required and will be helpful in the context of budgetary considerations.

## Referendum Campaigns

140. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the commitment the Government has given on holding a referendum on the eighth amendment. [41643/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government established a Citizens' Assembly, in line with its Programme for Partnership Government commitment, to consider a number of matters including constitutional reform. The Assembly first considered the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Article 40.3.3), and submitted its final report, setting out its recommendations, to the Oireachtas on 29 June 2017.

The Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution is now considering the report of the Citizens' Assembly in order to recommend to the Oireachtas the policy direction it should consider on the issue. The first public meeting of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, chaired by Senator Catherine Noone, was on 20 September. The Committee is to report its conclusions and recommendations to both Houses of the Oireachtas within three months of its first public meeting, which would therefore be due on or before 20 December 2017. The Joint Committee's report will then be debated in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Government has agreed to hold a referendum on the Eighth Amendment in May or June 2018 subject to the timely passage of a Constitutional Amendment Bill on the matter by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

## Home Care Packages

141. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if the homecare package for a person (details supplied) can be improved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42074/17]

**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 No. 142 answered with Question No. 131.*

## Maternity Services

143. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing foetal anomaly scans to all pregnant women in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42084/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis and this work will be led by the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme. Indeed, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the Programme and, accordingly, it will develop clinical guidance regarding routine detailed scans. 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 ultra-



sonographers who are skilled in using these machines. In this context, it is expected that the establishment of Maternity Networks across Hospital Groups will assist in developing a sustainable model that ensures that all women within each Hospital Group can access anomaly scans.

In relation to the specific query, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Mental Health Services Expenditure**

144. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the agency spend by CAMHS in each of the years 2012 to 2016 by CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42085/17]

**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.

### **Physiotherapy Provision**

145. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for the first assessment for qualification for children's physiotherapy services in County Kildare and west County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42086/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Speech and Language Therapy Provision**

146. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for their first assessment for possible qualification with the speech and language therapy department in County Kildare and west County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42087/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

147. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if he has approved a measure (details supplied) used for assessing persons for home care supports and packages at university college hospital Galway; the scoring system with regard to community supports; and the way in which low, medium and high carer vulnerability is decided. [42094/17]

148. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if he approved a measure (details supplied) used for assessing persons for home care supports and packages at university college hospital Galway at the time it was approved; the person that approved it; and if it operates in other counties. [42095/17]

149. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the routine, significant, critical and multiple care needs are being defined by the home care forum group of university college hospital Galway and the HSE. [42096/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 to 149, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Health Services Provision

150. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the additional clinics in place to deal with the waiting list in south County Galway in view of the difficulty in recruiting a community ophthalmologist to ensure that children are seen in a timely manner, taking cognisance of clinical need and clinical urgency, in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number on the waiting list for three, six, nine, 12, 18 and 24 months, respectively. [42098/17]

**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.

### Health Promotion

151. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the World Health Organisation protocol on monitoring food and beverage marketing to children via television and the Internet; the estimated extent and nature of children's exposure to marketing for high fat, salt and sugar, HFSS, foods via television and the Internet as per the protocol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42105/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I am aware of the World Health Organisation protocol on monitoring food and beverage marketing to children via television and the internet and this has influenced our own Code of Practice for food and drink promotion, marketing, product placement and sponsorship that has been developed by a working group and will be published shortly.

This Code, which specifically targets High Fat, Sugar and Salt foods (HFSS) and drinks has been developed as an early action in the 'Healthy Weight for Ireland' Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP) launched last September under the Healthy Ireland agenda. The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy.

The OPAP prescribes 'Ten Steps Forward' and under each step there are a number of actions, some of which have been identified for early implementation. Step 3 is to *Secure appropriate support from the commercial sector to play its part in obesity prevention*. I wish to emphasise that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this.

The World Health Organisation protocol on monitoring food and beverage marketing to children will also influence the revision of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Children's Communication Code which already targets advertising of High Fat, Sugar and Salt foods

(HFSS) and drinks on broadcast media.

### **School Meals Programme**

152. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the new nutrition standards under the school meals local projects scheme to other non-funded schools; the steps he will take to seek compliance with these standards by other schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42106/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The new Nutrition Standards for School Meals are available on the Department of Health and Healthy Ireland websites. They are also available as a link on the Department of Education and Skills and Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection websites.

My Department will be liaising with the Department of Education and Skills in relation to opportunities to extend the use of the Standards in schools outside the School Meals Local Projects Scheme.

The Nutrition Standards are available for use as guidelines for schools healthy eating policies in both primary and post primary schools and are being brought to the attention of schools by the Healthy Eating and Active Living programme in the Health Service Executive, through their schools teams.

Compliance with the Standards only applies to schools funded under the school meals local projects scheme and this monitoring is being carried out by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. A Service Level Agreement which included reference to compliance with the new Standards was sent to relevant schools participating in the Scheme last week by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

### **School Meals Programme**

153. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the foodstuffs and beverages covered and reimbursable under the new nutrition standards under the school meals local projects scheme; if there is documentation and guidance being provided to schools additional to the standards themselves to provide clarity on the foodstuffs and beverages that will be reimbursed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42107/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The foodstuffs and beverages covered and reimbursable under the new Nutrition Standards for the School Meals Local Projects Scheme is provided in detail in the Standards Report. These are nutritious foods and drinks from the four bottom shelves of the Food Pyramid and are influenced by the funding allocation available depending on the meals- breakfast, snack, lunch or mid afternoon snack or dinner allocation.

Standards for that apply to all meals and snacks are also given for foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt; for fats, spreads and oils and for drinks. These provide clarity on the foodstuffs and beverages that will be reimbursed under the Scheme. These Standards are comprehensive, therefore additional documentation and guidance is not being provided.

### **Physiotherapy Provision**

154. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is no physiotherapy service in the Erris peninsula; the reason this is the case; and the steps he is taking to alleviate the problem. [42110/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Hospital Appointments Administration**

155. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person's (details supplied) echocardiogram appointments are being rearranged on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42111/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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.

### **Pharmacy Services**

156. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the situation whereby pharmacists' prescriptions in some cases request the person to come back on a weekly basis even though they have a monthly prescription; if there are additional payments available to the pharmacists for filling the prescriptions on a phased basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42115/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In general, monthly prescriptions are dispensed by pharmacies on a monthly or 28-day basis depending on the type of medicine and the form in which it is packaged by the manufacturer. A prescriber may, on occasion, request that patients are only supplied with one week's supply of medicine at a time, due to the nature of the medicines involved and/or any ongoing safety concerns for the patient. In such circumstances, the prescription would be required to be dispensed by the pharmacy on a weekly basis, and this would be governed by the particular patient's care needs. This is known as phased dispensing and a fee is paid to a pharmacist for this service.

Claims by pharmacists for phased dispensing fees are only valid in certain narrow circumstances, where the dispensing on multiple supply occasions is:

- at the request of a patient's physician;
- due to the inherent nature of the medicine in terms of product stability and shelf life;
- where a patient is commencing new drug therapy with a view to establishing patient tolerance and acceptability before continuing on a full treatment regimen;
- in exceptional circumstances where the patient is incapable of safely and effectively man-

aging the medication regimen.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

157. **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. [42116/17]

**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 Staff Contracts**

158. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if contracts of employment will be offered to all 11 2017 mental health nurse graduates who wish to remain in County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42121/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I can confirm that all 2017 nursing and midwifery graduates will be offered permanent contracts by the HSE. These offers will be subject to the usual recruitment requirements. Nursing and midwifery recruitment and retention is a priority for the Government and officials in my Department are liaising with the HSE on a weekly basis to review progress on the appointment of nursing graduates.

These contracts are being offered as part of the 2017 Nursing and Midwifery Agreement, reached with the INMO and SIPTU. This Agreement has a particular focus on addressing recruitment and retention of nursing and midwifery posts. It has committed to put in place an additional 1,224 nursing and midwifery posts across the public health service by the end of December 2017. Very extensive and detailed work has been sustained throughout 2017 to implement the Agreement.

Each Hospital or Community Healthcare Organisation is making offers to the 2017 nursing and midwifery graduates who undertake their clinical placement in their location. Every effort is being made to accommodate the graduate nurses and midwives in their preferred locations. Where a Hospital or CHO area is unable to offer places to all graduates, then the remaining graduates are offered places in the respective Hospital Group or an alternative CHO location, as appropriate.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the specific data sought in the question.

### **HSE Staff Remuneration**



159. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 156 of 27 September 2017, if the 2015 circular on sleepover pay rates and its funding in the 2015 service plan applies to all HSE funded section 39 organisations in the sector; and if section 39 organisations are in his view the private sector providers as indicated in his response to Parliamentary Question No. 466 of 20 September 2017. [42128/17]

160. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 156 of 27 September 2017, if the 2015 circular on sleepover pay rates and its funding in the 2015 service plan applies to all HSE funded section 39 organisations in the sector; and if section 39 organisations are in his view the private sector providers. [42129/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 160 together.

In a Parliamentary Question answered on 27 September 2017, I advised that HSE HR Circular 027 / 2014 applies to HSE staff and staff employed by agencies that are funded by the HSE under section 38 of the Health Act 2004 who undertake sleepover duties as set out in the circular.

Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are employed in a private capacity and therefore neither the HSE nor the Minister have a role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff.

It is a matter for private employers to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of the terms and conditions of their employment.

### **Flood Relief Schemes**

161. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to amend the flood relief scheme for farmers in County Donegal administered by his Department. [41993/17]

162. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to amend the flood relief scheme for farmers in County Donegal in response to the concerns of farmer representative organisations; and if he will ensure that all categories of farmers are fully compensated for their losses. [41994/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 162 together.

As you may know, I visited the Inishowen Peninsula with my colleague Minister Joe McHugh following the exceptional rainfall of August 22nd 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 applies 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 is subject to the provisions of EU de minimis state aid rules in the agriculture sector and only losses not covered by insurance are eligible for consideration.

While it is not possible to address all of the problems the unprecedented rainfall caused on farms in Inishowen, this measure is in my view, a most comprehensive, timely and appropriate response to the main difficulties farmers there had to deal with.

The measure closed for applications last Friday 29th September and these will now be processed as quickly as possible.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

163. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure that a payment in relation to areas of natural constraint, ANC, due to a person (details supplied) is issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41997/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a 2017 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme's application on 10 May 2017. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

### **GLAS Applications**

164. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the commonage implementation committee will make a recommendation in respect of persons (details supplied) applying for GLAS payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42010/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A key driver of EU schemes is the sustainable environmental management of farmed land. In the case of commonage, account must be taken of the environmental effects of the actions of all active shareholders. Either a Commonage Management Plan or a Commonage Farm Plan must be prepared for each individual commonage as a baseline requirement for GLAS.

While agreement between the appointed Commonage Advisor and the active shareholders on the management of commonages is achievable in the majority of cases, it is also recognised that in a relatively small number of commonages such an agreement may not be forthcoming. The Commonage Implementation Committee was established to assist in the resolution of is-

sues arising.

The Committee meet as required including meeting this week. Once their recommendations are received and actioned by the Department, the individuals involved are notified.

### **Departmental Reports**

165. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the refusal of his Department to provide the Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board with the accident reports produced by the Marine Institute in relation to the catastrophic results of the storm events of 1 February 2014 on a salmon farm (details supplied) without an assurance from the appeals board that the reports would be kept confidential and were drafts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42011/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In July 2017 the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) requested a copy of a draft report concerning the incident referred to by the Deputy pursuant to Section 47(1)(a) of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act.

The Board subsequently withdrew its request following confirmation by my Department that the Report in its entirety remained in draft form.

As the request from ALAB was made in the context of the Board's consideration of an appeal against a decision to approve an aquaculture licence application for the cultivation of fin-fish at a site at Shot Head in Bantry Bay, and as the Board's consideration of this appeal remains ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

### **Fish Farming**

166. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he took against the operators of a fish farm (details supplied) as a result of the failure of the operators of a fish farm in a location to notify his Department of the catastrophic farm damage on 1 February 2014 until a week later. [42012/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the time of the incident referred to by the Deputy extreme weather conditions continued to be experienced, which delayed both the notification of the incident and its immediate investigation.

As the Deputy is aware my Department's examination of the matter, which is nearing completion, is detailed and involves all Engineering, Scientific, Environmental and Technical matters associated with the incident.

In addition, my Department is currently giving consideration to a recent High Court ruling concerning the site referred to by the Deputy.

As my Department's consideration of the High Court ruling is ongoing it would not be appropriate to comment further at this time.

### **Fish Farming**

167. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the loca-

tion, time and mortalities caused by jellyfish to salmon farms here in the past three years and to date in 2017; and the measures he plans to take to ensure the welfare and survival of farmed fish. [42013/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has been advised by the Marine Institute that the information requested by the Deputy is as follows:-

2014

- One site in Co. Donegal reported that jellyfish related mortality had occurred between June and September. This mortality was however, multifactorial in nature and it is not possible to quantify the losses which were specifically attributed to jellyfish.

- Two other sites located adjacent to each other also in Co. Donegal, reported gill and skin lesions similar to those caused by zooplankton, in August. Significant gill pathology was identified on one site, whilst minor skin lesions were identified on the other. As these were harvest size fish, mortalities were avoided by accelerating their harvest.

2015

- One site in Co. Donegal reported that jellyfish related mortality had occurred in October/November when the loss of 145,000 fish was recorded.

2016

- One site in Co. Cork reported that a generation of fish which went to sea in November 2014 experienced 3.3% mortality during the period up to harvest in October 2016.

2017

- Four aquaculture sites reported jellyfish related mortalities between Weeks 32 and 39

(i.e from week beginning August 7th to week beginning September 25th ). Three of these sites are located in Co. Galway and one is located in Co. Cork. Weekly mortality rates recorded during that period ranged from 2-19% in the southwest and from 1-80% in the west.

The welfare and survival of farmed fish which have suffered mortality due to an influx of jellyfish onto an aquaculture site, represents an acute episode, the management of which is overseen and directed by the operator's private veterinary practitioner. The ongoing health and welfare of farmed fish on a given site is overseen by the veterinary practitioner who is named in the health management plan that the operator supplies to the Marine Institute as part of the Fish Health Authorisation process. This care and direction is carried out in compliance with normal veterinary standards and within the parameters set out in the Farmed Salmonid Health Handbook, a document which was launched in 2011 and which supports an industry/ government backed Code of Good Practice. This approach is consistent with the requirements of SI No 261 of 2008 (European Communities (Health of Aquaculture Animals and Products) Regulations 2008 (as amended)).

## **Fish Farming**

168. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the location and stocking limits of the fin fish farms; the operators of same previously licensed by his Department that are now unlicensed and operating under the continuity mechanism introduced

in 2006 under section 19(A)4 of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997, while awaiting new licences. [42014/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested by the Deputy is not immediately available and will require a detailed examination of my Department's records. The information requested will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Harbours and Piers Maintenance**

169. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will complete the works on the breakwater at Greencastle Harbour, County Donegal to ensure safe access to the harbour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42034/17]

172. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will complete the works on the breakwater at Greencastle Harbour, County Donegal to ensure safe access to the harbour. [42053/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 172 together.

Greencastle Harbour is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for its development and ongoing maintenance rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government thereafter.

My Department does however provide limited funding to assist coastal Local Authorities in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

Donegal County Council has successfully secured the maximum funding allocation allowable of €112,500 under the 2017 Programme for development works at Greencastle Harbour.

Any applications submitted by Donegal County Council in relation to Greencastle Harbour in the future will be given due consideration within the terms and conditions of the Programme.

### **Harbours and Piers Development**

170. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has made a submission to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure that Greencastle harbour, County Donegal can be further developed under the capital plan 2016 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42035/17]

173. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has made a submission to the Minister for Finance to ensure that Greencastle Harbour, County Donegal can be further developed under the capital plan 2016 to 2021. [42054/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 170 and 173 together.



Greencastle Harbour is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for its maintenance and development rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government thereafter.

My Department owns, operates and maintains six designated State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl. In addition, my Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of specific piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board piers, lights and Beacons Act.

As my legislative remit does not extend to Greencastle Harbour, I can confirm that no submission has been made by my Department in this regard to the Minister for Finance or the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Harbours and Piers Development**

171. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if funding will be provided for the development of Leenan pier, Inishowen, County Donegal; if Donegal County Council will be advised to make an application in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42036/17]

174. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if funding will be provided for the development of Leenan pier, Inishowen, County Donegal; and if Donegal County Council will be advised to make an application in this regard. [42055/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 174 together.

Leenan Pier, Inishowen is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for its maintenance, repair and development rests with Donegal County Council in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government thereafter.

My Department does provide limited funding to assist coastal Local Authorities in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of Local Authority-owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities. I have allocated over €3.5m for these purposes under this year's Programme.

Records indicate that my Department did not receive a funding application under the 2017 Programme for Leenan Pier. In 2012 Donegal County Council did apply for funding in respect of Leenan Pier for the purposes of the installation of a crane, I am happy to inform the Deputy that on that occasion they received almost €83,000 in funding for that project.

Should an application be submitted by Donegal County Council in relation to this pier in the future, it will be given due consideration within the terms and conditions of the Programme.

*Question No. 172 answered with Question No. 169.*

*Question No. 173 answered with Question No. 170.*

*Question No. 174 answered with Question No. 171.*

## Folúntais ar Bhoird Stáit

175. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe ar son na hAeráide agus Comhshaoil cé mhéad duine atá ar Bhord TG4, an mó folúntas atá ann faoi láthair, agus cad é an plean agus an clár ama atá ag an Aire chun aon fholúntas a líonadh. [42005/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Tá 12 phost ar Bhord TG4, a bhfuil trí chinn díobh le líonadh faoi láthair. I gcomhréir leis na Treoirínte ar Cheapacháin chuig Boird Stáit, Samhain 2014, tá an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí (SCP) i mbun próisis faoi láthair maidir le hiarrthóirí oiriúnacha do na folúntais seo a shainnithint. Chomh luath is a fhaighim an tuarascáil ón SCP, glacfaidh mé céimeanna chun na folúntais a líonadh, chomh luath agus is féidir.

## Broadband Service Provision

176. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend the roll out of the fibre network to a commercial property (details supplied) in County Cork. [41998/17]

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which high speed good quality broadband is likely to become available throughout the country over the next three years; the extent to which this is likely to affect County Kildare with particular reference to existing black spots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42181/17]

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he will take to speed up the provision of broadband services through the medium of fibre optics throughout County Kildare with particular reference to known black spots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42186/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 176, 178 and 183 together.

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 led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). 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 provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county. There are over 2.3 million premises in Ireland of which approximately 542,000 premises are located in the AMBER area on the Map. Information on county coverage including townland statistics in each area is available on my Department’s website.

The position in relation to the areas referred to in the Deputies Questions is as follows:

- The map shows that the townland of Ballinterry Co Cork comprises 13 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 13 premises, 9 fall within the State Intervention area while the remaining 4 of these premises fall within eir's 300k planned rural deployment.

- There are over 90,000 premises in County Kildare of which over 13,000 fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP. The remaining c.77,000 premises fall within a BLUE area and will be covered by commercial operators, of which c.7,000 premises form part of eir's planned rural deployment to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018.

The eircode of the premise will indicate whether the premises 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 premises.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. Citizens can access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their premises using their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

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. A significant milestone in that procurement process was reached last week with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders and ultimate progression to the appointment of a preferred bidder(s).

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.

It is intended that all premises will have access to services of at least 30 Megabits per second when the procurement process for the State led intervention is completed and the network rolled out.

### **Broadcasting Sector Regulation**

177. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to review the code of conduct which was devised applying to all on demand audio visual service providers operating here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42104/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The European Communities (Audiovisual Media Services) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 258/10), provides for the implementation of certain aspects of the European Union Audiovisual Media Services Directive. Regulation 13 of said S.I. provides for a system of co-regulation by media service providers of on-demand audiovisual media services in the State, including the creation of codes of conduct for on-demand audiovisual media service providers.

Subsequent to this S.I., the On-demand Audiovisual Media Services Group (ODAS) was established under the auspices of IBEC and a code of conduct for on-demand audiovisual media service providers was created.

The code is prepared in cooperation with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, and is subject to the Authority's approval. The authority for initiating a review rests with ODAS.

At EU level, a revision of the Audio Visual Media Services Directive currently being negotiated is likely to require a change to the way in which On-demand services are regulated in Ireland.

However at present, there is no provision for my involvement as Minister, in the creation of codes of conduct nor in the revision of existing codes of conduct. Therefore, I have no function in this regard.

*Question No. 178 answered with Question No. 176.*

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he remains committed to achieving previously set targets in respect of greenhouse gas reduction; if he has satisfied himself with the progress to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42182/17]

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he has identified and hopes to achieve targets in relation to action to combat climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42189/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 and 185 together.

The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 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 for 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 purpose of the Plan is to specify the policy measures required in order to manage Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions at a level appropriate for making progress towards our long-term national transition objective as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as well as

to take into account existing EU and international obligations on the State in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. 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 emissions 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.

### **Mobile Telephony Services**

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which he directly or through the medium of ComReg influences the quality and coverage for mobile phones with particular reference to his own experience in these issues in view of the need to achieve an even and reliable quality of service in all areas throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42183/17]

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has had discussions with ComReg or service providers with a view to improving the quality and availability of the mobile telephone service throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42184/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

The provision of telecommunications services, including mobile phone and broadband services, is a matter for the service providers concerned which operate in a fully liberalised market regulated by the independent Regulator of the telecommunications sector, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). I do not have a statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services to particular locations. The regulation of telecommunications service providers generally, including allocating radio spectrum for mobile telephone services, the imposition of binding conditions and regulatory issues surrounding mobile phone network coverage and quality, in accordance with procurement or licensing conditions, are functions of ComReg.

Any customer across Ireland who experiences service difficulties should raise the matter with the service provider in the first instance. If this fails to resolve matters, customers can and should refer a complaint to ComReg, which will investigate the service provider's compliance with its contractual obligations.

Notwithstanding the independence of ComReg, I recognise the frustration experienced across Ireland where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. In that regard, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force. In July 2016, I established the Task Force to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate



how better services could be provided to consumers, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The December 2016 report of the Taskforce is available on my Department's website.

The Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders to produce the report which contains 40 actions to alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland. To maintain momentum, I established an Implementation Group to drive and monitor implementation of the actions, bringing together all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This group will report on progress every 90 days. The Implementation Group has met twice this year, in March and July, and is due to meet again in October. Two quarterly progress reports have been published so far, which are available on my Department's website. These demonstrate that good progress has been made in delivering the actions. I am also pleased at the sustained level of engagement between action owners and industry.

A stakeholder forum will take place in Athlone later this week, to take stock of progress made in implementing the Taskforce actions and to enable discussion on all the issues impacting on the rollout of telecoms infrastructure. It will also inform the review to be conducted prior to completion of an annual report by the Implementation Group at end 2017.

This work will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, following Regulations which I signed last year, ComReg's announcement earlier this year of the results of its auction for the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, will mean an 86% increase in spectrum capacity to meet the growing demand for mobile and wireless broadband services across rural and urban areas. The award of 15 year licences for the rights of use in this band will provide stability and create future investment certainty. Spectrum was also awarded in lots covering 9 urban and rural regions across Ireland.

The very significant commercial investment by mobile operators has resulted in improved services, with at least one operator now having in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

## **Electric Vehicles**

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which he expects electric cars to replace conventional motor vehicles over the next ten years; if adequate charging facilities are likely to be readily available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42185/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In May this year, the Government approved and published the National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland 2017 to 2030. This policy framework sets an ambitious target that by 2030 all new cars and vans sold in Ireland will be zero emissions (or zero emissions capable).

The policy framework also includes an indicative forecast of 20,000 electric cars in 2020, 250,000 in 2025 and 800,000 in 2030. This is based on the assumption that nearly all new cars sold in Ireland in 2030 are electric.

There are currently circa 900 publically accessible charge points installed across Ireland, of which circa 70 are fast chargers. For a country of our size, we have one of the more comprehensive charge point networks currently in place across Europe.

The provision of electric vehicle infrastructure, particularly the installation of public charging points, is a key focus of the work of the Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce. The Taskforce is co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and is examining options for infrastructure, regulation and pricing in order to devise a sustainable policy framework for effective and efficient electric vehicle recharging. The work of the Taskforce is well underway with a stakeholder engagement event in July helping inform proposals in relation to Budget 2018.

Large car manufacturers are also expected to become involved in the provision of high-powered infrastructure. A number of providers are likely to emerge onto the Irish market in the coming years. For example, Nissan already has a number of charge points available through its dealer network and Tesla has recently opened its first supercharger location in Ireland.

*Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 176.*

### **Climate Change Policy**

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps taken or likely to be taken by his Department in the future to combat the effects of climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42188/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Ireland's climate is changing consistent with regional and global trends. These changes are projected to continue and increase over the coming decades and include temperature rise, changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, sea level rise, and changes in precipitation patterns. The policy responses to climate change are two-fold:

- Mitigation of emissions of the greenhouse gases that are driving climate change
- Adaptation to the impacts of climate change

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides for the preparation of plans covering both mitigation and adaptation with the purpose of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. In responding to the low carbon challenge I published Ireland's first "National Mitigation Plan" on 19 July 2017 and under section 5 of the Act, my Department must also submit to Government for approval a National Adaptation Framework not later than 10 December 2017. A draft version of the Framework is currently out for public consultation which is scheduled to close on 27 October 2017.

The policy in relation to adaptation was first set out in Ireland's 2012 non-statutory "National Climate Change Adaptation Framework" and subsequently restated in the "National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development". Under the 2015 Act, the new National Adaptation Framework is to specify the national strategy for the application of adaptation measures in different sectors and by local authorities in their administrative areas in order to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of any positive effects that may occur. Relevant Ministers will be required to develop sectoral adaptation plans which will specify the adaptation policy measures they propose to adopt.

A number of resources are already in place to assist with adaptation planning including the web resource "Climate Ireland", forthcoming "Sectoral Guidelines for Planning for Climate Change Adaptation" and the 2016 "Local Authority Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Guidelines". Some sectors, that is Agriculture and Forestry, Transport, Energy and Flood Risk Management, have already developed plans under the 2012 Framework, while Local Govern-

ment is currently examining how a regional approach might be developed to address local/regional effects. A National Adaptation Steering Committee, chaired by my Department, was established under the 2012 Framework, and includes representation from key sectors and agencies. The work of this committee and its future deliberations under the new Framework will ensure appropriate levels of coordination across the relevant sectors so as to facilitate an effective transition to a climate resilient economy.

*Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 179.*

### **Renewable Energy Generation Targets**

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has satisfied himself that alternative energy production targets can be achieved on time in the course of future years with particular reference to the need to comply with international agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42190/17]

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which his Department continues to plan to utilise existing natural resources and invest for the future in his regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42191/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 187 together.

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has calculated that 27.1% of electricity, 6.7% of heat and 5.0% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2016. Overall, SEAI analysis shows that 9.4% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2016 were met from renewable sources. While good progress is being made, meeting our 2020 targets will be challenging.

The total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid is 3,400 MW approximately, of which 3,080 MW is wind generation. It is estimated that a total of between 3,900 MW and 4,300 MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to meet its 40% renewable electricity target. Given that we have 3,400 MW in place, we will need approximately a further 500 MW to 900 MW of additional renewable generation to meet our 2020 targets.

The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes in place or under development designed to stimulate further progress in the domestic renewable energy sector. These include the Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff (REFIT) schemes for the electricity sector and the Biofuel Obligation Scheme in the transport sector. These schemes have proved successful at incentivising large-scale investment in the renewable industry in recent years.

My Department is also currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme, designed to encourage further investment in the renewable electricity and heat sectors, respectively. A public consultation on the design principles of the proposed new RESS is currently underway and submissions are invited from the public. The introduction of any schemes - including the overall costs and technologies

to be supported - are subject to Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

In the transport sector, Ireland aims to meet its renewable target mainly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels, with electric vehicles also making a small contribution. The Biofuels Obligation Scheme (BOS) was increased from 6% to 8% by volume from 1 January 2017. A public consultation on future increases to the Biofuel Obligation Scheme, required to meet the 2020 renewable transport target will take place later this year.

### Waste Disposal

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which reliance on landfill waste disposal facilities continues to be monitored with particular reference to the utilisation of best practice in terms of reduce, re-use, recycle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42192/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** 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.

Waste Management planning, including infrastructure provision, is the responsibility of local authorities under Part II of the Waste Management Act, 1996. The three Waste Management Planning Lead Authorities monitor on an on-going basis the generation and management nationally of municipal solid waste and other waste streams. Under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance, in specific cases, by a local authority of their statutory functions under the Act.

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*.

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. 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 the 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.

### **Road Projects**

189. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Kilcornan traffic calming scheme. [42032/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. This also applies to the maintenance and management of national roads.

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.

### **Motor Tax**

190. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of issuing a motor tax certificate for those that apply online; the cost of an over the counter application; if this is comparative to the extra cost which is applied to those that tax their vehicles quarterly and six monthly compared to yearly; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42016/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Motor tax can be paid on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates of duty for half-yearly and quarterly motor tax are set at a higher rate than a pro-rata proportion of the annual rate of duty. The differential takes account of the extra workload for staff in motor tax offices and my own Department, which operates the online motor tax system, as well as the resultant administrative, banking and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. Each quarterly renewal of motor tax follows the same administrative procedure as the annual renewal process. Consequently, renewing on a quarterly basis generates four times the workload of an annual renewal for the equivalent period.

While motor tax policy is a matter for the Department of Housing Planning and Local



Government, I understand, based on motor tax receipts in 2016, receipts from the surcharge associated with the half-yearly and quarterly options was €55.4m, and accordingly the cost of abolishing the surcharge would be likely to be of that order in a full year. The loss of income that would arise from changing the current arrangements, whether at setting motor tax at a pro-rata rate or introducing a lower percentage additional charge, would have a negative impact on the total collected via motor tax and would have to be borne elsewhere in the motor tax system or through the taxation system generally. The basis of charging for half-yearly and quarterly discs is provided for in secondary legislation.

Data compiled by the Controller and Auditor General Report for a recent report on the 'Administration and Collection of Motor Tax' found that the average cost of a motor tax transaction in a motor tax office (over the counter) as being just over €10, and the cost of an online transaction being just under €5.

### **Road Projects**

191. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is examining the capital expenditure needed to improve road infrastructure which would also include road safety measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42044/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

In addition the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Investment priorities for the period to 2022 are set out in the Capital Plan published in September 2015. Decisions on the transport elements of the Capital Plan were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with the balance being spent on the PPP road programme and a limited number of road improvement projects.

As regards the allocation of additional funding as part of the Capital Plan Review, decisions on such allocations have yet to be made by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. As Minister I have to work within the budget available to my Department.

### **Garda Reports**

192. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has received a more detailed breakdown of the report from the Department of Justice and Equality on An Garda Síochána's report regarding the inflated breath test figures by district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42045/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My officials have received a copy of the report of the examination, carried out by Assistant Commissioner Michael O’Sullivan, of the recording of breath tests at Mandatory Alcohol/Intoxicant Testing (M.A.T./M.I.T.) Checkpoints. I understand that the report contains a breakdown, by Region/Division in tabular form, of the number of MAT/MIT Checkpoints, the number of those Checkpoints on PULSE, the average duration (time) of each Checkpoint, the number of breath tests recorded on the roadside breath testing equipment (Drager) and so on. I also understand that a further breakdown by district, as referred to by the Deputy, is not anticipated.

### **An Clár Caipitil Spóirt**

193. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt an bhfuil cinneadh déanta aige ar an iarratas atá déanta faoin Deontas Caipitil Spóirt do 2017 ag club iomartha i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí tugtha); mura bhfuil, cén uair a bheidh cinneadh déanta ag an Aire agus cén uair a bheidh na deontais faoin Deontas Caipitil Spóirt do 2017 á bhfógairt aige; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42051/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** Dúnadh babhta 2017 den Chlár Caipitil Spóirt le haghaidh iarratais ar an 24 Feabhra agus is féidir liom a dhearbhú go bhfuil iarratas curtha isteach ag an eagraíocht atá i gceist. Fuarthas líon taifead de 2,320 iarratais a bhí ag lorg € 155 milliún i ndeontais. Is é an méid iomlán atá ar fáil faoi láthair le leithdháileadh faoin babhta seo ná € 30 milliún. Dá réir sin, beidh leithdháileadh na ndeontas dúshlánach.

Tá na 2,320 iarratas uile a fuarthas á scrúdú faoi láthair ag oifigigh i mo Roinn. Tá súil agam go mbeidh sé in ann fôgra a dhéanamh maidir le leithroinnt sna seachtainí atá romhainn.

### **Penalty Points System**

194. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when penalty points for drivers holding a mobile phone while driving will be increased as discussed during the Dáil Éireann debate on the Road Traffic Bill in December 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42059/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Using a mobile phone while driving is one of the four main causes of deaths on our roads, together with speeding, intoxicated driving, and non-wearing of seatbelts. My Department increased the number of penalty points for this offence from 2 to 3 on payment of a fixed charge (and to 5 on conviction) in 2014. The same year, a new offence was created which means that drivers detected texting while driving now face a mandatory court appearance and fine of up to €1,000, reflecting how dangerous this practice is.

My officials keep penalty points under constant review and I am willing to consider increasing the penalty points further for use of mobile phones and the other most serious killer behaviours on our roads.

However, given recent developments in technology, it is no longer quite as easy to define what behaviour falls within the parameters of the Act. Given the many different uses for phones and the various options for hands-free use of phones, a significant body of work is required to adequately legislate for this behaviour. While I am focused on progressing the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017 through the Houses of the Oireachtas, I have also asked my officials

to commence work in this area with a view to progressing it in the context of the next Road Traffic Bill.

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

195. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if officials in his Department are working on the consolidation of the Road Traffic Acts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42060/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The consolidation of existing road traffic legislation is a significant project, requiring the allocation of resources specifically to deal with such a project over an estimated two to three year period. In light of the fact that my officials are currently working on a number of Bills, most of which are primarily focused on road safety, it is not possible to commence such a consolidation project at this time.

### **Driver Licences**

196. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding disqualified drivers returning their licences to the Road Safety Authority's post office box in Cork in view of the fact that figures from the RSA revealed that 98% of disqualified drivers are not surrendering their licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42061/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am sure that the Deputy will agree with me that the key issue with disqualified drivers is that they should not drive while disqualified.

The figure the Deputy quotes is of course a matter of concern, and I have asked the Road Safety Authority to look into it. However, I do not believe that the non-return of licences, unacceptable and illegal though it is, is a central issue. It certainly cannot be interpreted as a proxy figure for numbers driving while disqualified. People could return their licences but still drive while disqualified, and people might retain the physical licence but not drive.

Enforcement of the law on driver disqualification is a matter for An Garda Síochána. In the past the tools available in the law to address this matter may have been inadequate. However, the Road Traffic Act 2014 introduced a new power of arrest where a member of An Garda Síochána forms the opinion that a person is driving while disqualified. This is an important tool in addressing those who persist in driving in spite of disqualification.

### **Cycling Facilities Provision**

197. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed Boyneside cycle way trail project for Drogheda and east County Meath (details supplied); if the necessary funds will be made available to progress the project to boost tourism and physical activity in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42092/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department recently undertook a public consultation process to inform the development of a new Greenways Strategy. Meath County Council contributed to this process, highlighting the merit of progressing the project to which the Deputy refers. My officials are currently reviewing the many sub-

missions received from both citizens and stakeholders, including the submission from Meath County Council. My Department is aiming to have the new Strategy completed by the end of the year. Following completion, it is expected that a new round of funding for greenway infrastructure will be announced, subject to the level of funding available.

Given the National Transport Authority's (NTA's) responsibility for the provision of cycling infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and the NTA's involvement in this project to date, I am forwarding the Deputy's question to the NTA for any additional comment and direct response to you. If you have not received a further reply within 10 working days please contact my office.

### **Departmental Contracts Data**

198. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department and State agencies under his remit; the fees charged for each contract; the State agency involved in each contract; the nature of each contract in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42093/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link *External Services*. The information is updated every 6 months. Material is currently being collated for the period January 2017 to June 2017 and will be published as soon as this process is complete.

Information regarding agencies is a matter for the agencies themselves, I have forwarded your question to the agencies under my remit for direct response to you. If you do not hear back from them within 10 working days please don't hesitate to contact my private office.

### **Aviation Industry Regulations**

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 39 of 28 June 2017, the start date for the public consultation process that is to take place as part of the review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973. [42118/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Further to my response to the Deputy on 28th June, it is my intention that the public consultation process on the review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973 will be considered having regard to the outcome of an initial internal review of the Order.

I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has now commenced its internal review of the Order.

### **Aviation Industry Regulations**

200. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to a letter sent by the UK Civil Aviation Authority to a company (details supplied) and the enforcement action launched against the same company by the UK CAA; and if he has queried with the IAA whether it has done or plans to do the same. [42119/17]

205. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has issued an instruction to the Commission for Aviation Regulation to liaise with the civil aviation authority in the UK in respect of a Europe wide issue with a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42176/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 205 together.

The Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) is the independent regulator for the enforcement of air passenger rights in Ireland, functioning as the national enforcement body for such matters.

I am aware that CAR has been working directly with Ryanair since the announcements of flight cancellations were made to ensure that the provisions of EU Regulation 261 of 2004 were correctly applied in respect of the passengers affected.

On Friday 29 September, CAR announced that it has secured agreement from Ryanair that it will comply with the regulations and directly provide affected customers with the necessary information on refunds, rerouting, care and assistance and compensation. Ryanair has also issued a public statement explaining to customers how and when they will be re-accommodated on other Ryanair flights or other airline flights. It is understood that Ryanair has also committed to provide weekly updates to CAR on the number of passengers entitled to compensation and expenses, the number of claims submitted and the number of claims closed-out.

The Commission for Aviation Regulation is part of a close network of national enforcement bodies across the EU, including the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in UK. It is noted that Ryanair has recently replied to correspondence received from the UK CAA and has agreed to meet its requirement for customer clarification on Ryanair's obligations under regulation 261, which are in line with those requested by the CAR.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

201. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a club (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42172/17]

**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 the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to. 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.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

202. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a club (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42173/17]



**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 the 24th February. By this deadline no application had been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. 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.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

203. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a club (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42174/17]

**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 the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to. 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.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

204. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a club (details supplied) for a sports capital grant. [42175/17]

**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 the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to. 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.

*Question No. 205 answered with Question No. 200.*

## **Transport Policy**

206. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether it would be beneficial to have an integrated statutory body responsible for all modes of public transport and roads infrastructure in the region that acts separately from Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, and the National Roads Authority, NRA, in view of the size and demographics of the greater Dublin area transport area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42179/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** In Ireland, with some exceptions, transport infrastructure and services are currently provided and facilitated through my Department and its agencies with a national rather than a local focus. The National Transport Authority (NTA) is the statutory non-commercial body tasked with undertaking strategic planning of transport, investing in all public transport infrastructure and developing the effective management of traffic and transport demand for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) was established through a merger of the National Roads Authority and the Railway Procurement Agency under the Roads Act 2015, with effect from 01/08/15. The TII’s primary function is to provide an integrated approach to the future development and operation of the national roads network and light rail infrastructure throughout Ireland.

Under the amended Dublin Transport Act 2008, the NTA is responsible for the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), 2016-2035 which I adopted in April 2016 and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Strategy will guide decisions on transport throughout the region and will contribute to the economic, social and cultural progress of the GDA (counties Dublin, Meath, Wicklow and Kildare) by providing for the efficient, effective and sustainable movement of people and goods. The NTA is also responsible for submitting observations to the relevant Minister on whether it believes draft local development plans and proposed variations to local development plans are consistent with its transport strategy.

The Government recently published for public consultation “Ireland 2040 – Our Plan”, which will guide national, regional and local planning opportunities throughout Ireland together with investment decisions for at least the next two decades. The enhanced development of Ireland’s five cities is fundamental to Ireland 2040, requiring a strongly co-ordinated focus within the metropolitan functional areas on a range of key issues. The planning and strategic development policies set out in Ireland 2040 will better support the development of an integrated and sustainable public transport system.

### **Sports Capital Programme**

207. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will announce sport capital grants funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42180/17]

**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 the 24th February. 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.

### **Affordable Childcare Scheme Eligibility**

208. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review the workings of the affordable child care scheme to allow for full crèche entitlement (details supplied) for those attending on non-consecutive days; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42002/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Childcare provisions in my Department operate to support parents to access employment and to meet the needs and well-being of children.

It is considered to be in the best interests of children to have regular and consistent patterns of childcare and our systems are set up with this in mind.

In certain exceptional circumstances, we do allow for unusual arrangements, but as currently constructed we cannot facilitate all possible permutations of childcare. Our system operates on the basis of fixed weekly patterns. This may be something that my Department can review for future programme cycles as unfortunately, it is not possible to make major system changes after the operational commencement of a childcare programme.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

209. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the limits he has put on the costings for administration by local authorities on works to be carried out under the local improvement schemes to ensure as many roads as possible are repaired under the scheme to the highest standard possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42038/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** On 21st September, I announced the provision of €10 million for a Local Improvement Scheme (LIS). This is a nation-wide scheme which supports improvement works on private and non-public roads.

My Department wrote to Local Authorities in August to establish the level of demand for an LIS scheme this year. The Local Authorities were advised that any requests for funds would be subject to their capacity to complete any proposed works in 2017, and funding availability. All local authorities were also notified that the scheme was subject to the rules laid out in the Local Improvement Scheme Memorandum issued by the then Department of the Environment and Local Government in 2002.

In relation to County Councils' allowable administrative expenses, the Memorandum outlines that such expenses shall be such sum not exceeding 15% of the net cost as apportioned by the Council in respect of engineering and office staff, office accommodation and stationary.

“Net cost” covers the cost of labour (including gangers and supervisors), materials and equipment. It should not include any sum for compensation or land or rights of way required for the purpose of undertaking a project.

All works carried out under the LIS should be to the required standards and my Department will be monitoring all expenditure and conducting sample inspections to ensure the work is completed as detailed in the project submissions.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

210. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a carer's allowance has been cut from a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42057/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to a person who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

The department periodically reviews claims in payment to ensure that there is continued entitlement.

CA is in payment to the person concerned since 5 November 2009 and a review of means was recently carried out.

The outcome of this review is that the person concerned was assessed with means of €328.68 per week derived from her spouse's employment. This exceeds the statutory means limit. As a result of this, she is no longer entitled to CA and her payment will cease from 12 October 2017.

The person concerned was notified on 25 September 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

However, as long as her son continues to require ongoing care and attention, substantially over and above the care and attention usually required by a child of the same age, she may continue to receive the domiciliary care allowance and the annual carer's support grant (CSG) that is payable in June each year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

211. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive payment of a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41995/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This lady has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 5 October 2016. The first payment will issue by her selected payment method on 11 October 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy..

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

212. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) who was assessed by a social welfare inspector in June 2017 is still awaiting an outcome on their disability allowance application; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that the inspector's report was never submitted to the disability allowance section to date and that this person applied for the allowance in October 2016; and if the report can be located. [42007/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection**

**(Deputy Finian McGrath):** I can confirm that my department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady. On 6 July 2017 the application was referred by a deciding officer (DO) to a social welfare investigative officer (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances.

The SWI is currently in the process of finalising their report and once it is submitted to the DO, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Payments**

213. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive a disability allowance payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42024/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This lady has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 30 November 2016. The first payment will issue by her selected payment method on 18 October 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in respect of an appeal for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); when matters are likely to be brought to a conclusion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42041/17]

**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 registered in that office on 13th June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 25th September 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for 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.

### **Labour Activation Programmes**



215. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined who has been placed on two different back to work schemes but has been told they can only accept certain offers and have reluctantly had to turn down a number of suitable offers; if their social welfare payments can be affected if they refuse to accept a place on a scheme they do not wish to participate in; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42050/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The customer was referred to the Job Club service on 12th June 2017 and attended in September 2017. The customer was also referred to the JobPath service on 17th June 2017, and agreed a personal progression plan with the JobPath provider on 6th July 2017. Having been referred to JobPath which provides an intensive 12 month programme of support for the Long Term Unemployed the customer's attendance at the JobClub was not required nor was it mandatory in this customer's circumstance. The circumstances of a cross over in referrals are being examined by my department and I shall revert to the Deputy when inquiries have been completed.

Participation on JobPath is mandatory for all jobseekers selected by my department. The Social Welfare (Consolidated) Act 2005, as amended, specifies that participation in activation meetings is mandatory for those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance. A failure to engage with JobPath can result in the application of sanctions, but all decisions regarding a person's welfare entitlements while on JobPath are taken only by department Officials and not by the JobPath companies. The process for sanctioning clients who do not engage with the JobPath activation process is exactly the same as the process for clients who fail to engage with my department's own activation service.

Should a sanction be applied and the customer considers it has been applied unfairly or in error it is open to the customer to request a review with her local Intreo office or she can make an appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office either by e-mailing [swappeals@welfare.ie](mailto:swappeals@welfare.ie) or by writing to The Chief Appeals Officer, Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2, D02 XY31.

I understand that the JobPath provider is currently investigating a complaint made by the customer in question regarding the service provided. It is a contractual requirement that the JobPath service provider in the first instance must investigate any issues that may arise in respect of the service they provide.

If having exhausted the provider's complaints process, the customer remains dissatisfied they may request my department to carry out a review. This request must be in writing and clearly state the reasons why the customer is dissatisfied.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Services Programme**

216. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an organisation (details supplied) was not invited to make a business case to Pobal for funding from the community services programme; the steps it should take in order that the organisation can meet the criteria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42058/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Community Services Programme (CSP) provides financial support to community companies that provide revenue generating services of a social inclusion nature. Many of these companies

are also funded from other sources and generate revenue from the public use of their facilities and services. The CSP provides a contribution to the wage costs of the companies on the basis that the services are not fully self-financing or the cost of provision would be prohibitive on users.

An additional €1m in CSP funding was announced in Budget 2017 and, arising from this, a targeted call for new CSP applications via SICAP Programme Implementers was announced in May 2017. The call was targeted at CSP Strand 3 organisations type only. These are social enterprises who deliver services that meet a need in the community, particularly disadvantaged communities, and who use the CSP funding contribution to employ staff from specific disadvantaged target groups, which include:

- the long-term unemployed;
- Persons in receipt of disability allowance, invalidity pension or blind person's pension;
- Travellers in receipt of jobseeker's payments or OFP;
- Stabilised and recovering drug misusers;
- People with convictions;
- People who are homeless; and
- Immigrants.

An expression of interest (EOI) was submitted by Inishowen Development Partnership on behalf of iCare, as part of the 2017 targeted call. The organisation did not progress to business planning as it does not adequately meet the EOI call criteria, namely the services proposed are primarily children's and youth services providing childcare and youth club services, which are not eligible under CSP. In addition, the application has not demonstrated that employment creation, support and progression for members of the target group is a core objective of the service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Public Services Card**

217. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures that are in place to protect adoptees whose attention has not been drawn to their adoption in cases in which they apply for the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42072/17]

218. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason adoptees have to provide a copy of their birth certificate when applying for the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42073/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

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, as the Adopted Children Register is maintained centrally in the General Register Office, all requests for certificates relating to adoptions must be made to that office. Consequently, adopted persons are asked to bring their adoption certificate (not their birth certificate) with them when they attend for SAFE registration. This is in line with the requirements both here and in other countries when applying for services that require verification of identity, such as a passport or driving licence.

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.

### **School Meals Programme**

219. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the protocols that will be in place if, under the new nutrition standards as part of the school meals programme, a school exceeds the numbers of days in a week that it provides a food stuff or beverage that does not meet the standards; if funding will be stopped; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42108/17]

220. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if recipe submission by schools is a requirement as part of the school meals programme funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42109/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to schools and organisations at a total cost of some €47.5 million in 2017. As part of Budget 2017, the funding for the scheme was substantially increased this year by an additional €5.5 million which will benefit over 50,000 additional children from September 2017 bringing the total number of schools in the scheme to some 1,700 and the number of children supported to up to 250,000.

The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them. The recently published nutrition standards for school meals, under the auspices of Healthy Ireland, will be a valuable resource to enable and promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles in schools. These standards will compliment and strengthen the support and controls already in place.

Schools and organisations must reapply for funding under the school meals scheme in advance of each school year and list the food items to be provided for each food club on their application. Detailed records must be submitted at the end of each school year. Expenditure on items that do not meet the standards will be deducted from the following year's funding allocation. In addition, the Department initiated an on-site inspection programme in 2012 in par-

ticipating schools to ensure that the scheme rules are being adhered to. The inspection process is being rolled out across all schools and includes an assessment of the type of food provided.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Nitrates Usage**

221. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to extend the period of time for slurry spreading for a time of at least 30 days due to the adverse weather conditions experienced in 2017 in order to allow farmers to effectively and efficiently spread slurry on their lands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42178/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I refer to the reply to Question Nos. 278 and 280 of 28 September 2017 which sets out the position in this matter.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects new guidelines in respect of wind turbines, wind farms or solar energy farms to become effective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42187/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My predecessor as Minister, in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, announced an emerging “preferred draft approach” to the review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines in June 2017.

A copy of the announcement is available on my Department’s website at the following link:<http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/wind-energy/coveney-and-naughten-announce-key-development-review-wind-energy-development-guidelines>.

As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) will be undertaken on the “proposed draft approach” to the revised Guidelines before they come into effect. This is in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the SEA Directive. SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process.

It is envisaged that the SEA process will take approximately 9 months and tendering to engage consultants to carry out that process is currently underway. In light of the SEA requirements, it is expected that the Guidelines will not be finalised and come into effect until 2018. In the meantime, the current Guidelines remain in force.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

In relation to solar farms, there are no specific planning guidelines in place. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments.

Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Planning and Development Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments. However, the matter will be kept under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and his Department - which leads on renewable energy policy - in the context of the Government's White Paper on Energy Policy, published in December 2015, the development of a Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework, as well as the finalisation of a new support scheme for renewable electricity by that Department, expected in 2018.

### **An Bord Pleanála**

223. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the decisions made by An Bord Pleanála countrywide in each of the years 2012 to 2016 that were contrary to the inspector's report. [41991/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Since the establishment of An Bord Pleanála in 1977, planning legislation has clearly assigned final responsibility for decisions on planning appeals to the Board and not to inspectors preparing reports and making recommendations to the Board.

The number of Inspectors' recommendations not generally accepted in the final decisions made by the Board in the period referred to is as follows, along with the percentage of these cases as a percentage of the overall number of cases decided by the Board in that year:

2012 - 284 (19.9%),

2013 - 339 (17.7%),

2014 - 229 (15.4%),

2015 - 204 (12.7%), and

2016 - 244 (14.8%).

This information, and other related statistics, are publically available in An Bord Pleanála's Annual Reports which can be accessed on the following link: <http://www.pleanala.ie/publications/index.htm>.



## Social and Affordable Housing Provision

224. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason it is taking Sligo County Council over two and half years to advance the proposed 20 unit housing development at Carrowbunnaun, Strandhill, County Sligo to beyond stage 1 of development; the further reason the other housing developments planned for County Sligo are also developing slowly; if funding and resources are the reason for this slow pace; his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42008/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Sligo County Council has an ambitious pipeline of construction projects in development to meet the social housing needs of the county. Details of these projects are available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-schemes-2017/>.

The timing and delivery of these projects is a matter in the first place for Sligo County Council. I understand from the Council that the project at Carrowbunnaun faces a number of challenges in relation to negotiations with third parties, site access, road alignment and waste water infrastructure, all of which have impacted on the project's advancement. I understand that the Councillors have been briefed by officials on these issues. There is no question in relation to my Department's funding support for this or other projects; all costs incurred as the project is advanced through design and planning, and onto construction, can and will be met as soon as they arise and I am keen that the project progresses as speedily as possible.

While the project at Carrowbunnaun faces a number of challenges, I understand that Sligo County Council is working on additional construction proposals to further strengthen their delivery pipeline, as well as taking proactive steps to deliver social housing through other initiatives to address its housing need. In 2016 and to date in 2017, around 100 vacant social homes have been returned to productive use by Sligo County Council and 48 new social homes have been acquired. Additional staffing resources were approved in 2016 for Sligo County Council's Housing Unit to accelerate delivery of their social housing and regeneration programmes.

In relation to addressing project delays, I recently announced a number of outcomes arising from the first phase of my review of Rebuilding Ireland. These include a commitment that Minister of State English will lead a new delivery team in my Department to work with local authorities and approved housing bodies. I anticipate this team will focus in on accelerating social housing construction projects to ensure that, notwithstanding the genuine challenges that arise with construction projects of all types, progress is made to ensure delivery as quickly as possible.

## Housing Data

225. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on the housing lists in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42021/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments. The most recent statutory summary of social housing assessments, carried out in 2016, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 21 September 2016.

The results are available on my Department's website at the link below and include breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories. The 2016 report also includes the results of the 2013 summary for comparative purposes:

[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary\\_of\\_social\\_housing\\_assessments\\_2016.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf).

In line with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 future summaries will now be carried out on an annual basis. I expect the results of the 2017 summary to be available for publication later in the year.

### **Referendum Campaigns**

226. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the commitment the Government has given on holding referendums on reducing the voting age to 16, the direct election of executive mayors and extending the franchise at presidential elections. [41643/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Government announced on 26 September 2017 that it had agreed an indicative timetable for the holding of a number of referendums on proposals for amendments to the Constitution arising from the work of the Citizens' Assembly and the Convention on the Constitution.

In this context, my Department will bring forward appropriate Constitution Amendment Bills on reducing the voting age to 16 and on extending the franchise at Presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State. These referendums will address two of the recommendations of the Convention on the Constitution. Subject to the passage of the Constitution Amendment Bills by the Houses of the Oireachtas, it is proposed that these referendums would be held on the same day as the local and European elections in June 2019.

The indicative timetable also includes the holding of a plebiscite in October 2018 on directly elected executive mayors. The issue of metropolitan governance, including directly elected mayors, is currently being examined in my Department in the context of the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government on local government reform.

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

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if financial assistance is available for persons to install filters for private wells; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42112/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Funding is available under my Department's Rural Water Programme towards the provision or necessary improvement of private wells for domestic users.

The terms and conditions of the scheme are set out in an Explanatory Memorandum which is available from local authorities and on my Department's website at the following link : <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/private-wells>.

### **Planning Issues**

228. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views regarding persons objecting to planning applications (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42124/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In making a decision on a planning application or appeal, a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the development plan, and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, as well as the views of members of the public. Public participation is, therefore, a crucial element of all substantive decision-making processes under the Planning and Development Act 2000 and is also a requirement under the Aarhus Convention and Environmental Impact Assessment Directives in relation to specific types of developments.

It is open to any member of the public to make an observation or submission on a planning application and the planning authority is statutorily obliged to consider such submissions before making a decision on the application. Persons who make submissions are also entitled to be notified of any significant further information provided to the planning authority by the applicant and to be notified of the authority's decision on the application. Furthermore, any person who made a submission on a planning application may appeal the planning authority's decision on the application to An Bord Pleanála or may make a submission to the Board in relation to an appeal of that decision.

The fees payable by members of the public to participate in the planning decision-making process are set at a level that, as well as contributing towards the cost of processing applications and appeals, discourages frivolous or vexatious submissions without hindering genuine public participation. In addition, the Board has discretion to dismiss an appeal where it is satisfied that the appeal is vexatious, frivolous or without substance or foundation or where the appeal is made with the sole intention of delaying development or of securing the payment of money, gifts, considerations or other inducement by any person.

I am satisfied that the current arrangements in relation to public participation in decision-making contribute significantly to the openness and transparency of the planning process and I have no proposals to amend the legislation in this regard.

### **Private Rented Accommodation Data**

229. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the use to which the statistics his office receive from the RTB and the PRTB are put; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42125/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** It is crucial that policy decisions are based on and supported by the best available evidence where possible. This is why the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) Rent Index is so important. Since October 2013, the RTB, in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), has produced the RTB Rent Index on a quarterly basis. The RTB Rent Index is the most accurate and authoritative rent report of its kind on the private accommodation sector in Ireland. It is generated using the actual rent figures provided when registering with the RTB.

Recent legislation established rent pressure zones in certain areas and laid out the process through which further rent pressure zones can be established. To enable the designation of rent pressure zones at a more granular level, the RTB, working with the ESRI, has developed a methodology to provide rental price information at a more local level, enabling the designa-

tion of Local Electoral Areas (LEA) as rent pressure zones as well as improving the Index more generally and providing a more detailed and useful picture of the performance of the rental sector. The information collected by the RTB provides a robust basis for implementing the Rent Pressure Zones and for monitoring their impact.

As well as information on rent levels, the RTB's statistics on tenancy registrations and on its dispute resolution activities provide important information on the behaviour of the rental market and the impact of Government policies. The role of the RTB is still evolving and will develop over the medium term and the range and quality of the information that it produces will increase.

On 19 September, I announced that the RTB will be given the powers and resources to take on greater regulatory responsibility in the rental sector over the next two years. As part of this change, the RTB will move towards annual registration of tenancies, which will permit the building of a national rent dataset, allowing the Board to provide benchmark rents for different property types. This enhanced data will be key to understanding trends and behaviour in the rental market as well as informing future policy decisions.

### **Pension Provisions**

230. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which the superannuation benefits of Defence Forces commissioned officers who are PRSI class A contributors are integrated with the range of social welfare benefits to include the payment of the State pension (contributory). [42089/17]

231. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the arrangements that are applied in cases in which Defence Forces commissioned officers are forced to retire mandatorily on age grounds in advance of the eligibility and payment of the State pension (contributory). [42090/17]

232. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the arrangements in place for Defence Forces commissioned officers who joined the Defence Forces since 1 January 2013 under the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 factoring the unique mandatory retirement ages imposed by Defence Forces regulations and alignment with the entitlement of the State pension (contributory) for those that accrue 30 years of PRSI class A contributions. [42091/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 to 232, inclusive, together.

Commissioned officers who joined the Permanent Defence Force on or after the 6th April 1995 are, like other public servants appointed since then, insurable for full PRSI and so are entitled to the full range of Social Insurance benefits including the State Pension Contributory. Both the employers and employees make PRSI contributions. In an integrated pension scheme, the State Pension is viewed as part of the overall pension package payable to the individual. The combined benefit from both sources – the occupational pension plus the State Pension – makes up the person's 'total pension'. On that basis, the employees' occupational pensions are subject to a process – known as "integration" – whereby the occupational pension arrangements take account of entitlement to Social Insurance benefits (including the State Pension).

Integration is a standard feature of public service pension schemes applicable to employees in full PRSI class who, whether joining the public service before or since April 1995, were subject to full PRSI. Integration does not apply to retirement gratuities. Integration begins from

the time the occupational pension comes into payment and operates on the assumption that a Social Insurance benefit is, in fact, payable. However, except in cases of ill-health early retirement, Social Insurance benefits may actually not be payable until age 66 to 68 (depending on a person's date of birth). Under standard public service pension scheme arrangements for those who joined the public service before 1 January 2013 in full PRSI class, a 'supplementary pension' may be payable in certain circumstances on compulsory retirement prior to State Pension age (66/68) in order to make up the shortfall in total pension in the interim.

This supplementary pension is not payable automatically once a person reaches compulsory retirement age – such as age 60/65 in the wider public service – or some years earlier in the case of military personnel. Rather, the supplementary pension is payable only during periods in which the pensioner is (a) not in insurable employment; and (b) due to causes outside his or her control, fails to qualify for Social Welfare benefit / pension (or qualifies at a rate less than the maximum personal rate of State Pension). The pensioner must meet these qualifying criteria to qualify for payment. Therefore, the supplementary pension is not payable where a 'pre-January 2013' public service pensioner is, subsequent to compulsory retirement – for example at age 58, 60 or 65 – working or employed in any capacity that involves a Social Insurance contribution.

As I indicated to the House in my replies to Question No. 51 on 11 July 2017 and Question No. 2106 on 11 September 2017, the Single Public Service Pension Scheme was one of the key structural fiscal reform commitments agreed by Government with the EU/IMF in 2010 under the programme of financial support for Ireland. In the context of the Government's decision to introduce the Single Scheme, a stated primary objective is to help significantly reduce the cost of public service pensions in the longer-term through far-reaching transformation and reform of the public service pension system. It provides for a new approach which modernises and standardises pension arrangements throughout the public service. The terms and rules of the Single Scheme – which are fundamentally different to the superannuation arrangements of all public servants recruited before 1 January 2013 – make no provision for the concept or award of supplementary pensions for any new entrants joining any public service group on or after 1 January 2013. This position has been confirmed to the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations.

However, the absence of any provision for the supplementary pension concept in the Single Scheme must be viewed in the overall context of the fundamental changes and reforms to the pension scheme terms of post-2013 new entrants. Such reforms were decided by Government and the Oireachtas as necessary to support the long-term financial sustainability of the public service pension system. In that context, there are many other established features of the pre-1 January 2013 public service occupational pension arrangements that have been discontinued, or that have been fundamentally changed, under the Single Scheme. Among the most notable of these changes is the introduction of career-average pension accrual under the Single Scheme, in place of the more costly final salary pension accrual applicable in the earlier "pre-existing" public service pension schemes.

### Air Corps

233. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of chemical risk assessments on record with the Air Corps group formation health and safety office. [42130/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As this matter pertains to litigation which is ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.



## **Defence Forces Training**

234. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if chemical health and safety training is provided to new recruits and cadets as part of their basic training; and if not, if it will be made mandatory as soon as possible. [42131/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised by the relevant military authorities that basic Health and Safety training is provided to all new entrants to the Defence Forces. Where a requirement for more specific Health and Safety training is identified for an individual or group of individuals for their post, this training is provided by qualified Defence Force safety personnel. For example individuals working with chemicals will receive Chemical Awareness training as required.

## **Cycling Facilities Provision**

235. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for a cycle lane at the Curragh, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42171/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My Department is not considering any proposals to introduce a cycle lane on Curragh lands. Primary responsibility for the roads in the Curragh lies with Kildare County Council. If the Council wishes to approach my Department with any such proposals, my officials are available to engage with them on the matter.