

Written Answers.

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

Imports Data

1. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the amount of timber being imported. [42982/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

It should be noted that the 2017 data covers the period January to July.

Table A : Imports of Timber by division 2015 - 2017

Division	2015 €m	2015 Tonnes	2016 €m	2016 Tonnes	Jan-Jul 2017 €m	Jan-Jul 2017 Tonnes
Crude materials-Wood	157	428,918	156	508,408	86	278,675
Manufactured goods-Timber (excl furniture)	226	224,326	236	244,019	150	156,428

Ministerial Functions

2. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Taoiseach if there were changes in the powers delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; and if so, the details of same. [42787/17]

The Taoiseach: At my request, on 5 July, the Government made an Order delegating my statutory functions in relation to the Central Statistics Office under the Statistics Act 1993, the Civil Service Regulation Acts 1956 to 2005 and the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 to the Government Chief Whip, Deputy McHugh. On 14 June 2016, at the request of my predecessor, the Government made an Order delegating the same statutory functions to the then Government Chief Whip, Deputy Doherty.

Community Development Projects

3. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Taoiseach further to Parliamentary Question No.93 of 3 October 2017, the funding allocated in 2016 and 2017 for projects in the north east inner city; and if this funding will be recurring or if it is a once off expenditure, in tabular format. [42789/17]

The Taoiseach: The 2016 funding allocated to the North East Inner City to help the Community implement a number of interim measures is detailed in the published Mulvey Report which is available on *merrionstreet.ie*.

As previously outlined further measures for 2017 were agreed by the Programme Implementation Board at a cost of €2.5 million which are set out in more detail below - these contain a mixture of once off and recurring measures. Funding for 2018 has been sought as part of the Estimates process.

Priority Area	Report Action	Budget
Tackling Crime and Drugs	CCTV installation at key locations	€300,000
	Measures to target street dealing and drug related intimidation	€75,000
	Youth Leadership and Integration of targeted approaches for youth-at-risk	€53,000
Employment and Training	Enhanced Career Guidance Service	€20,130
	English language training for new communities	€40,000
	Construction Skills Course	€20,000
Family, Children and Youth Services	Pilot local schools initiative	€50,000
	Programme of local community events summer projects, and folklore project	€235,000
	Community grants scheme	€100,000
	Restorative practice and standardised area training for staff	€61,300
	Other supports targeting well-being, family support and counselling	€162,400
Improving the Physical Landscape	Youth outreach and services hub	€96,000
	Public environment maintenance project	€80,000
	Urgent Physical Improvement Works	€692,170
	Target Derelict Sites, shopfront improvement and Street Art	€240,000
	Greening Strategy	€200,000
	Programme Office Costs	€75,000
	Total	€2,500,000

Departmental Websites

4. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the reason his speeches are no longer put up on his Department's website (details supplied); if a decision was taken to place all speeches on *merrionstreet.ie* instead; and if he or his officials have other plans for his Department's website. [42987/17]

The Taoiseach: There has been no change to the practice of publishing speeches to the Department's websites, which are up to date. There are currently no plans for changes to the Department's website.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

5. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if there has been a recent response from Prime Minister May regarding the Dublin-Monaghan bombings. [42988/17]

The Taoiseach: As I reported on October 3rd, I have raised the Dublin/Monaghan Bomb-

ings and other legacy cases with Prime Minister May and have stressed the importance of making progress on legacy issues and the overall arrangements for dealing with the past.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government in relation to the Dublin-Monaghan bombings, and pursue all possible avenues that could achieve progress on this issue, consistent with the request made by the Dáil, and in the hope that this could bring some measure of closure to the families.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

6. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach further to Parliamentary Question Nos 1 to 7 of 4 October 2017, if he will report on his bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Rutte and their discussion on Brexit; and if other issues were discussed. [42989/17]

The Taoiseach: Ongoing political engagement with our EU and international partners is crucial, especially as negotiations on Brexit proceed. I continue to use every opportunity to ensure that other Member States and the EU institutions fully understand our particular concerns arising from Brexit, to enable the best possible outcome for this country. Of course, other Ministers - particularly Minister Coveney, who has special responsibility for Brexit - are also meeting with their EU counterparts on a regular basis.

As part of my own engagements, I met bilaterally with the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, while we were both in Tallinn for the Digital Summit on 29 September. We discussed progress in relation to the Brexit negotiations, and I thanked the Prime Minister for his understanding of Ireland's particular concerns. We also exchanged views about the Bratislava Process and the future direction of Europe.

I invited PM Rutte to visit Dublin later this year when I hope we will have a further opportunity to discuss these issues in detail. Dates for his visit are currently being explored.

Civil Service Code of Conduct

7. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if guidelines were issued in his Department regarding political party activity. [42991/17]

The Taoiseach: As part of my Department's induction process, all employees receive - and sign up to - the *Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour*. Part 2, Section 5 of that Code deals with the issue of civil servants and politics.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Investigations

8. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if special measures are put in place with regard to monitoring the activities of companies reported to the ODCE for serious transgressions while those investigations are ongoing, such as in the case of a company (details supplied) which continues to operate. [43001/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) was established under the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001 and continued under the Companies Act 2014. Under the provisions of the 2014 Act, the Director is responsible for enforcing and encourag-

ing compliance with company law, investigating suspected offences under the Companies Act, prosecuting detected breaches of the Companies Act, referring cases to the Director of Public Prosecutions on indictment and exercising a supervisory role over the activities of liquidators and receivers.

Section 949(3) of the Companies Act 2014 provides that the Director of Corporate Enforcement shall be independent in the performance of his statutory functions. I, as Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in such matters. Consequently, it is not possible for me to intervene in any action or decision taken by the Director in relation to his statutory functions.

Health and Safety Inspections

9. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the request made by the CEO of the Health and Safety Authority that 50 inspectors are needed to ensure farm safety; the number of farm safety inspectors employed by the HSA; and the number of new inspectors that have been hired to date in 2017 in relation farm safety. [42495/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is responsible for the enforcement of health and safety in the workplace. The farming sector is a sector of particular focus of attention by the HSA due to the large number of accidents and fatalities on Irish farms. In order to address this situation the HSA, in addition to traditional inspections, is adopting a parallel approach of targeted engagement and awareness-raising directly with the farming community.

The Agriculture Sector is unique in several respects. It is predominately made up of individual self-employed, self-supervised sole traders whose work is generally intrinsically linked to the family home and family life. Pressures and difficulties in agricultural work are generally exacerbated by seasonality, periods of peak activity, time pressures and the constant influence of various weather conditions. The aim of the HSA is to prevent loss of life, serious injury and ill health arising out of agricultural work activity to farmers, farm families and all who interact with farmers.

In 2017 the HSA aims to improve health and safety in agriculture by –

- carrying out 2,000 inspections
- continuing the emphasis on engagement with farmers e.g. through knowledge sharing groups, combined with a series of agriculture inspection campaigns both nationally and regionally;
- conducting two agriculture inspection campaigns, each of three weeks' duration. The first began on 1st March and was concerned with livestock safety and the second commenced on 2nd May and focussed on tractors and machinery. The campaigns had both a national and regional focus and were also supported by media campaigns;
- continuing to deliver coordinated awareness raising/safety promotion/training initiatives with major stake holders (e.g. the National Farm Safety Conference which will take place on the 17th November in Ennis);

- assisting in the implementation of the second year of the Farm Safety Action Plan 2016-2018, developed in conjunction with the Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee. This

plan lays out a series of specific actions and priorities for tackling the high rates of illness, injury and death on Irish farms including active participation by the HSA in Farm Safety Week which took place in July and the Ploughing Championship in September.

My Department has sanctioned the recruitment of 11 inspector posts for the HSA. On foot of these sanctions the Authority is currently completing its recruitment process for these inspector posts. Of these posts 6 relate to inspectors who will have an involvement in future farm inspection programs.

Comments made by the CEO of the HSA in a recent radio interview to the HSA having identified a need for an additional 48 new posts are in reference to a draft two-year Workforce Plan produced by the HSA and submitted very recently to my Department. I have not seen that draft Workforce Plan which is being considered by my officials in conjunction with the HSA. I should point out that the 48 new posts being requested cover a range of sectors and grades including clerical and administrative posts. None of the additional posts referred to in the draft Plan include dedicated farm inspection resources

Local Enterprise Offices Data

10. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of LEO business expansion grants given to businesses in County Meath in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42683/17]

11. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of funding under the LEO business expansion grant allocated to businesses in County Meath in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42684/17]

12. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the average grant amount given to businesses in County Meath under the LEO business expansion grant in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42685/17]

13. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of LEO grants allocated to businesses in County Meath in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42686/17]

14. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the grant amounts and number of grants allocated by the Meath LEO in 2016 to businesses by sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42687/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 10 to 14, inclusive, together.

In 2016, the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Meath approved 25 grants – feasibility, priming and business expansion – in total for the year, to a value of €293,998. The allocation included three business expansion grants totalling €47,500 for its clients. This equates to an average grant amount of €15,833.

Details of business sectors covered by these grants are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: LEO Meath Grant Allocations by Business Sector 2016

Business Sector	Amount Allocated	No. Allocated
Business Services	€92,590	6

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Business Sector	Amount Allocated	No. Allocated
Clothing & Fashion	€6,366	1
Communications, Media & Entertainment Services	€3,230	1
Craft	€5,000	1
Customer Services	€7,500	1
Engineering	€3,000	1
Environment/Green Technologies	€36,000	1
Food Manufacturing & Processing	€61,989	5
Furniture/Light Consumer Goods Manufacture	€15,698	3
Manufacturing Other	€22,500	1
Software/IT	€40,125	4
Grand Total	€293,998	25

As the first-stop-shop for the provision of supports to the micro-enterprise and small business sector in the county, in 2016 the LEO Meath ran training courses for 427 participants, provided mentoring services for 229 participants and supported 22 applications for loan finance to MicroFinance Ireland.

The LEO Meath also approved four grants totalling €8,815 to its clients under the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS), which is administered by the LEOs on behalf of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Finally, under the Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) competition, the €50,000 investment fund available to LEO Meath was awarded to the winners and runners-up in the three categories: best new business idea, best new start-up and best established business. In 2016, a total of 69 young entrepreneurs applied for the IBYE competition in LEO Meath, bringing the total number of applicants in the county since the competition commenced in 2014 to 134.

Ministerial Functions

15. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the powers she has delegated to the Ministers of State in her Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42773/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On the 20th June, the Taoiseach re-appointed Mr. John Halligan T.D. and Mr. Pat Breen T.D. as Ministers of State with responsibility for policy areas under the remit of my Department.

On 26th July, the Government made orders for the delegation of Ministerial functions to Ministers Halligan and Breen at my request.

Minister Halligan has been delegated responsibility for Innovation, Research and Development (IRD), and will oversee implementation of the Government's national strategy in this area, Innovation 2020. He has been given responsibility for the delivery of IRD programmes across the agencies of my Department and the development of a successor to the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. He has also been delegated responsibility for Ireland's

membership of International Research Organisations and European Space Agency in addition to sectoral research initiatives that my Department is involved in, Ireland's engagement with the EU Framework Programme in Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020, and maintaining an Intellectual Property framework aimed at promoting and rewarding creativity, supporting innovative activity and improving the business environment.

These areas of responsibility are similar to what had been delegated to Minister Halligan prior to June 2017. Statutory Instrument No. 363 of 2017 entitled "Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No 3) Order 2017", sets out in detail the specific areas of responsibility that Minister Halligan has.

Minister Breen has again been assigned responsibility for Industrial Relations legislation, the industrial relations machinery of the State as well as the Workplace Relations Act 2015. He also has responsibility for ensuring a renewed focus on Occupational Health and Safety matters and on Chemical Policy matters. He has been delegated responsibility for Ireland's engagement with the International Labour Organisation and for a range of issues of relevance to business and Small and Medium Enterprises, including leading efforts to reduce the administrative burden on business. Following his reappointment, Minister Breen has additionally been given responsibility for the Digital Single Market.

Minister Breen had previously been delegated responsibility for Employment Rights and associated legislation, and for the Low Pay Commission and their programme of work in relation to the National Minimum Wage. As responsibility for these areas has now transferred to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, they are no longer part of Minister Breen's responsibilities.

Statutory Instrument No. 362 of 2017 entitled "Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No 2) Order 2017", sets out in detail the specific areas of responsibility that Minister Breen has.

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

16. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of newly created IDA backed jobs in County Donegal between 2012 and 2016; the number of IDA site visits that have occurred in County Donegal between 2016 and 2017 involving new and prospective IDA clients; her future development plans for job creation within the county over the next four years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42859/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am determined to support the growth of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in County Donegal. Last year the number of IDA supported jobs in County Donegal grew by 4%, reaching a total of 3,039. The Agency continues to work hard to create further employment opportunities in the County and to increase the number of multinational companies located there, which currently includes SITA, Optibelt and Pramerica.

The table outlines the total number of IDA Ireland supported companies in Donegal and the total number of jobs created by the Agency's clients there from 2012 to 2016.

Donegal	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1. No of Companies	13	13	13	12	12

Donegal	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
2. Total Jobs	2,223	2,382	2,607	2,918	3,039
3. Gross Gains	164	183	247	330	145
4. Losses	-42	-24	-22	-19	-24
5. Net Change	122	159	225	311	121

IDA Ireland always does its utmost to encourage clients to locate in regional areas. This includes using site visits to showcase investment locations to clients. In Donegal, there have been eight such site visits since 2016.

We have to remember, however, that the ultimate decision as to where to invest is always taken by the company itself. It is also important to emphasise that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as at least 70% of all new foreign direct investment comes from existing IDA Ireland client companies.

More broadly, IDA Ireland markets Donegal, together with Sligo and Leitrim, as part of its North West region. The Agency's business development strategy for the region includes efforts aimed at increasing investment from the global business services and high tech manufacturing sectors.

Action Plan for Jobs

17. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new jobs that have been created from the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 (details supplied); the regions, sector and target for 31 December 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42936/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs process is working. Since the first Plan was launched in early 2012, there are over 225,000 more people at work bringing total employment in the State to almost 2,063,000 by end of Quarter 2, 2017.

The goal of this Government is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020 with 135,000 outside Dublin. This is a whole of Government effort and is delivered through our integrated Action Plan for Jobs.

There were 14,700 new jobs created in the first three months to 31 March 2017, with a further 3,300 new jobs created between April and the end of 30 June. There is no data available yet for the third quarter of 2017.

Up to Q2 2017, employment grew faster in the regions (2.8%) than in Dublin (1.5%) with four out of five jobs created in the regions. The largest increases were recorded in the information and communications and the construction sectors.

The target number of new jobs to be created in 2017 is 45,000, as of Q2, 40% of this target has been achieved.

I will be working with Ministerial colleagues to ensure that the 2018 Plan is ambitious and impactful and keeps us on track to deliver on both our 2017 and 2020 targets.

Foreign Direct Investment

18. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of small scale sector appropriate foreign direct investment enterprises that have been brought to small rural towns by the IDA over each of the past five years. [42965/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The IDA is focused on attracting job-rich foreign direct investment (FDI) by multinationals to Ireland. One of the Agency's key priorities is ensuring that such investment is spread as evenly as possible around the country and that every region of Ireland benefits from overseas FDI.

While the general global trend is for FDI to be located in or around major urban areas, the IDA has placed a special emphasis on attracting overseas companies to regional Ireland. This is evidenced by the Agency's current five-year strategy, which sets ambitious targets of increasing investment by between 30-40% in every region of the country by 2019.

Progress continues to be made towards reaching that goal. For example, the Agency's mid-year results for 2017 show that 54% of all job approvals so far this year are for investments located outside of Dublin. This is up from 37% at the same time last year. Moreover, over half of all IDA Ireland supported jobs created last year were based outside of Dublin.

The investments that have been secured for rural and regional areas span many different sectors and industries. They also differ significantly in their individual size and scale. Their key unifying feature is that the companies behind the investments have all decided to locate or expand outside of Ireland's main urban centres. I am confident that the confidence that these businesses have rightfully placed in the regions will help lead in turn to further FDI across the country.

Lobbying Data

19. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of occasions on which she has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons she has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; her views on the issues raised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42284/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since my appointment as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in June, I have not attended any meetings regarding the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

20. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the regulations in place for pricing algorithms in the tourism and hospitality sector. [42370/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Dynamic pricing algorithms have been implemented, for instance, by airlines, hotel booking services and transportation network companies to efficiently adjust supply to periods of lower or higher demand, resulting in procompetitive effects. However, competition

concerns might arise if companies start sharing the same dynamic pricing algorithm, which may be programmed not to compete against other firms, but to set anti-competitive prices in breach of competition law. Should the Deputy have evidence of any alleged anti-competitive conduct, he should refer the matter to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the statutory body tasked with the enforcement of competition law in the State.

Insurance Coverage

21. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to ensure proper and effective regulation of insurance companies on the issue of refusing flood cover; if it will be ensured that cover cannot be refused after adequate flood defence measures have been put in place (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42612/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

However, the provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. As Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals or businesses. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

Government policy in relation to flooding is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems. This in turn should lead to the increased availability of flood insurance. To achieve this aim, there is a focus on:

- prioritising spending on flood relief measures by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and relevant local authorities,
- development of plans by the OPW to implement flood relief schemes, and
- improving channels of communication between the OPW and the insurance industry in order to reach a better understanding about the provision of flood cover in marginal areas.

Insurance Ireland has informed me that its members, since 1 June 2014, have factored data on all completed flood defence schemes, provided by the OPW, into its assessment of flood risk within these areas. This information has been provided as part of an information sharing arrangement entered into between OPW and Insurance Ireland (Memorandum of Understanding). The nature of this arrangement is such that it should lead to a greater availability of flood cover in previously higher risk areas, and at better prices.

While it is not possible for me to comment on individual cases without the full facts, I am advised by the OPW that Bath Avenue Gardens, Dublin 4 is within the benefiting area of the River Dodder Tidal Scheme, the details of which have been shared with Insurance Ireland under the Memorandum of Understanding.

I note however, that the River Dodder Tidal Scheme contains 3 demountable defences. The

most recent Insurance Ireland survey (December 2016) of approximately 85% of the property insurance market in Ireland indicates that of 16 completed defence schemes, there has been an increase from 66% to 77% of policies in areas benefiting from demountable defences including flood cover. Increasing the provision of flood insurance to households in areas protected by schemes containing demountable defences is a topic which is subject to ongoing discussions between Insurance Ireland, the Department of Finance, and the OPW.

Finally, you should be aware that a consumer can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to any dealings with a Financial Services or Insurance provider during which they feel they have been unfairly treated. In addition, individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance or believe that they are being treated unfairly may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance.

Tribunals of Inquiry Expenditure

22. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 122 of 20 September 2017, the parties that received reimbursement under the section reimbursements to the State Claims Agency in respect of third party claims, which amounts to over €5.4 million up to the end of August 2017. [42814/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The State Claims Agency have advised me that it is not possible, at the present time, to divulge the full details of the seven third-party costs settlements comprising the sum of €5,493,524.00, on grounds of the commercial sensitivity attaching to those settlements, in circumstances where there are other outstanding thirty party Bills of Costs.

However, when all Moriarty Tribunal third party costs have been agreed, it may be possible, at that time, to furnish the details the Deputy has requested.

Property Tax Assessments

23. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to basing property tax on income for pensioners similar to the French system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42815/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 2012 report of the Inter-departmental Group on the Design of a Local Property Tax (the “Thornhill Group”) comprehensively examined the basis of assessment for the Local Property Tax (LPT). The report favoured the use of market value of residential properties as the basis of assessment and this recommendation was accepted by the Government. The Group considered that under a market value approach applied to housing, the market value of a residential property would be related to the characteristics of the building itself, the site on which it was located and the characteristics and amenities of the neighbourhood. There would be a relationship between the market value of a house and benefits to the owners in terms of enjoyment of the amenity value of the properties.

At the request of the Minister for Finance, the operation of the LPT was reviewed in 2015 by Dr. Thornhill. A number of submissions to the review favoured changing the basis of determination of LPT liabilities to site value, floor area or variations thereof. Dr. Thornhill considered these but remained of the view that market value is the most appropriate and equitable basis on which to determine LPT liabilities.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, as amended provides for a system of deferral and partial deferral arrangements in certain circumstances to assist individuals who may have difficulty paying the tax. Deferral/partial deferral is not an exemption and attaches as a charge on the property until the liability is paid. The deferral/partial deferral option also attracts an annual interest charge of 4%.

Where a liable person does not qualify for, or does not wish to avail of, a deferral, phased payment of LPT can be used to assist with budgeting. The Government is aware of the difficulties facing many individuals and families, and for this reason a wide variety of methods for payment of the LPT are available from which liable persons can choose the method most suited to their individual circumstances. The LPT can be paid by way of phased payments rather than in a single payment; it can also be paid by direct debit; or through payment service providers such as An Post TaxPay, Payzone and Omnivend.

Property owners who wish to avail of the deferral option or require clarification in regard to their particular circumstances should contact the LPT Helpline at 1890 200 255 to make the necessary arrangements.

NAMA Reports

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if he will publish the seven yearly reports regarding NAMA's use of post acquisition powers submitted to the European Commission and Irish competition authorities in each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42471/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that as outlined in my response to Dáil Question No. 80 of 26 September, 2017, a stipulation of the European Commission's decision, of 26 February 2010, on the "Establishment of a National Asset Management Agency (NAMA): Asset relief scheme for banks in Ireland", (Ref: State aid N725/2009 - Ireland), was a requirement that the Irish authorities "report on a yearly basis on the use of such post acquisition powers to both the Commission and the Irish competition authorities (paragraph (74)vii.7)".

As was outlined in my response to this question, a total of seven reports have been prepared and submitted to the European Commission and the Irish Competition Authorities for the years 2010-2016 inclusive, outlining that NAMA is in full compliance with the requirements of the decision. I wish to advise the Deputy that these reports were prepared specifically for these bodies and supplied under an obligation of confidentiality, as they contain sensitive information about NAMA's operations. As such, it is not possible to publish these reports.

State Claims Agency

25. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the avenue of appeal open to persons that have applied to the State Claims Agency and have had their claim turned down.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42480/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTMA is designated as the State Claims Agency (SCA) when managing claims against the State and State Authorities and carrying out related risk management functions in order to reduce the costs of future litigation against the State.

The SCA's remit covers personal injuries and third-party property damage claims made against approximately 146 State Authorities including the State itself. It also manages third-party costs arising from certain Tribunals of Inquiry and claims for legal costs by parties who have successfully sued the State in respect of personal injury and non-personal injury related litigation.

The SCA's claims management objective is, while acting in the best interests of tax payers in matters of personal injury and property damage litigation, to act fairly and ethically in its dealings with people who have suffered injuries and/or damage and who take legal actions against the State or State bodies, and the families of these people. In cases where the SCA investigation concludes that the relevant State Authority bears some or all liability, it seeks to settle claims expeditiously and on fair and reasonable terms. If it considers that the State is not liable the SCA's policy is to apply all necessary resources to defend the claims.

Where the State Claims Agency successfully defends a claim following a Court Trial, it is open to the unsuccessful plaintiff to Appeal that Court's decision to a higher Court and, in appropriate cases, the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

26. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if a person that purchases a new build with a local authority mortgage is eligible for the help-to-buy scheme if that new build matches all the criteria for the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42501/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In order to be successful, claims under the Help to Buy incentive must satisfy a range of criteria, including that the qualifying loan is secured by the mortgage of a freehold or leasehold estate or interest in, or a charge on, a qualifying residence or a self-build qualifying residence and that the loan is provided by a qualifying lender. In accordance with sections 477C and 244A(3)(e) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, local authorities are qualifying lenders for the purposes of the Help to Buy Incentive.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

27. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the funding received from the nursing home support scheme in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42507/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue's role in the Nursing Home Support scheme is confined to that of collection agent for the Health Service Executive (HSE) in respect of loan funding provided under the Ancillary State Support scheme.

The table sets out the loan amounts and associated interest recovered by Revenue for the years 2011 to 2017 (year to date) inclusive.

Revenue has no role to play in the wider Nursing Home Support scheme.

Year	Loan Repayments	Interest	Total Paid
2011	€1,415,638	€460	€1,416,098
2012	€4,611,464	€14,118	€4,625,582
2013	€6,614,617	€50,504	€6,665,121

Year	Loan Repayments	Interest	Total Paid
2014	€8,817,731	€76,056	€8,893,787
2015	€11,942,081	€132,701	€12,074,782
2016	€14,069,197	€178,210	€14,247,408
2017 (at end Sept)	€13,463,457	€114,598	€13,578,055
Total	€60,934,186	€566,648	€61,500,833

NAMA Operations

28. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the persons or organisations that are the 51% owners of the NAMA group; the shareholding of each of these persons and organisations; the amount of dividend paid to each in each year to date since NAMA was established; the expected dividend that will be paid to them between October 2017 and the conclusion of NAMA's activities; the amount of funding each of these invested in the NAMA group; if they will receive an additional 10% of their contributed capital sum at the dissolution; the amount provided by the private sector in relation to the capital contribution to the establishment of the NAMA group which assisted in the NAMA liabilities not being on the State balance sheet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42508/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that in its decision issued in July 2009, Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Union) ruled that special purpose vehicles (SPVs) which were majority owned by private companies would be regarded as being outside of the government sector if they met a number of conditions. Among the conditions were that the SPVs were of temporary duration and were established for the sole purpose of addressing the financial crisis.

In order to avail of this accounting treatment, NAMA established an investment holding company – National Asset Management Agency Investment D.A.C. – which is majority-owned by private investors. 51% of its shares are collectively owned by private companies and the remaining 49% are owned by NAMA. Under the shareholders' agreement between NAMA and the Private Investors, NAMA exercises a veto over decisions taken by the company. Eurostat gave its approval to this structure in October 2009.

The total issued share capital of National Asset Management Agency Investment D.A.C is €100m of which €51m (51m B Ordinary shares of €0.10 each and Share Premium of €45.9m) was invested by the Private Investors, each receiving an equal share of the 51 million B ordinary shares.

The breakdown of share capital invested by the original Private Investors in 2010 was as follows:

Shareholder	Share Capital Invested €
Irish Life Assurance PLC	17,000,000
New Ireland Assurance Company PLC	17,000,000
Percy Nominees Limited	17,000,000

The current shareholders are as follows:

Shareholder	Share Count	% Share Count
BNY Custodial Nominees (Ireland) Limited	17,000,000	17%
New Ireland Assurance Company PLC	17,000,000	17%

Shareholder	Share Count	% Share Count
Arthur Michael Joseph Keeley	8,687,500	8.69%
The Church of Ireland Clergy Pensions Fund	3,250,000	3.25%
The Representative Church Body	2,500,000	2.50%
Geoffrey Ian Broomhead	1,312,500	1.30%
Simon Stuart Haworth	1,250,000	1.25%

Under the shareholders' agreement, the maximum return which will be paid to the private investors by way of dividend is restricted to the 10 year Irish Government Bond Yield applying at the date of the declaration of the dividend. The table below set out the dividend per share paid to Private Investors in each year to date since NAMA was established. The cumulative dividend paid to Private Investors to date is €13.5m.

Year Dividend Declared and Paid	Dividend per Share	Dividend Paid €'000
2011	0.09987	5,093
2012	0.06778	3,457
2013	0.0424	2,162
2014	0.0302	1,540
2015	0.00757	386
2016	0.00719	367
2017	0.01072	547
Total Dividends paid to private investors to Sept. 2017		13,552

I wish to advise the Deputy that it is not possible to predict future expected dividend, as it is based on the company's performance in any given year. However, as outlined above, any dividend is restricted to the 10 year Irish Government Bond Yield applying at the date of the declaration of the dividend. Under EU Commission approval if the company meets its performance objectives and the 51% B shareholders are repaid, there is a provision for the private investors to be also repaid a further amount of up to 10% of their capital. Under the Articles of Association of National Asset Management Agency Investment D.A.C. any post-dissolution return to the private investors is capped at 10% of the equity interest.

Public Services Card

29. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the agencies within his remit that plan to make services or payments dependent on the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42512/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that of the eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department, seventeen have no plans to make services or payments dependent on the public services card.

In line with Government policy to develop a single authentication mechanism for customers to access public services and to get their due entitlements, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners is in discussion with the Department of Social Protection and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer about how such a mechanism can be utilised by customers of its myAccount service. Revenue's myAccount is a secure online service which can be accessed by customers using their PPS number and a Revenue issued password or, alternatively if they have a verified MyGovID account (which is administered by the Department of Social Protection and is linked to the Public Services Card), customers can use their MyGovID details. A

transition to authentication via MyGovID will be introduced on a phased basis, starting with individuals taking up employment for the first time.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

30. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if studies have been carried out to investigate the impact of the help-to-buy scheme on house prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42601/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): An independent assessment of the Help to Buy initiative with the following terms of reference was commissioned by my predecessor earlier this year:

- Undertake a general evaluation of the Help to Buy Incentive since its inception, including the level of uptake by potential first-time buyers and the rates of registration by contractors to participate in the scheme.

- Examine the design of the incentive, particularly with regard to the Department's Tax Expenditure Guidelines.

- Assess any potential impact on house prices, endeavouring to examine this both in relation to new build properties to which the incentive applies, as well as to house price trends generally.

- The research report should contain quantitative as well as qualitative analysis and will draw on the results of recent research carried out on the residential property market in Ireland.

Following a competitive tender process, Indecon Economic Consultants were awarded the contract to undertake the assessment in April 2017. Indecon submitted their report to me recently and I expect to publish it later today.

Primary Medical Certificates Provision

31. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if a primary medical certificate will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42602/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provision of a primary medical certificate is based on a professional clinical determination by the Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive. To qualify for a primary medical certificate an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal. The Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations.

Mortgage Schemes

32. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce the key worker mortgage scheme as part of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42689/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It appears that the Deputy's question

may refer to a UK initiative, the “Key Worker Living Programme” for public sector workers, as a ‘key worker mortgage scheme’ has never existed in Ireland.

The provision of housing-related supports is primarily a matter for my colleagues the Minister for Housing, Mr. Eoghan Murphy, T.D., and the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Ms. Regina Doherty, T.D.

Approved Housing Bodies

33. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if long term leasing or other similar agreements to pay rent by local authorities to approved housing bodies is included as a liability as a debt on the Government balance sheet; the rules surrounding the level of liability which is taken onto the Government balance sheet in circumstances in which such payments are for a period of 30 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42703/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHBs and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements. These provide that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term time period, typically 20 years. In return, the housing unit is made available for social housing purposes.

Rental payments from Local Authorities to AHBs are classified as government expenditure in accordance with the European System of Accounts (ESA 2010).

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

34. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe for small business to be approved by the Revenue Commissioners for the EII scheme; if he will address the delay for a company (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42715/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Employment and Investment Incentive (“EII”) scheme, found in Part 16 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, is a tax incentive whereby individuals who invest in certain qualifying companies obtain tax relief on the amount invested.

The entitlement to relief under the scheme is determined after the SME has issued shares to a qualifying investor. However, I am advised by Revenue that as an administrative measure, they provide what is known as “outline approval” to companies in advance of the shares issuing. This is where Revenue are prepared to express the opinion that, based on the information provided, relief under EII is likely to be available for an investment in a company. There is no requirement for a company to obtain outline approval prior to issuing shares. Therefore, the absence of outline approval does not prevent a company raising capital.

The company referred to by the deputy applied for outline approval on 18th August. That application is awaiting attention and will be dealt with in due course. Revenue has informed me that all correspondence in relation to EII is dealt with in date order.

I am advised by Revenue that they are experiencing some backlog in processing requests for approval under this scheme and that there has been an increase in the volume of correspondence

on the scheme. This backlog is due to an increase in the number of companies applying for certification and to the increased complexity brought to the scheme by certain necessary changes to ensure consistency with European law made in Finance Act, 2015.

Revenue has put in place procedures to reduce the backlog and it is anticipated that the application by the company referred to will be processed within the next 6 weeks. In addition, a review of the frequently raised issues has led to a re-design of the application forms to reduce correspondence relating to each application. Furthermore, a tax manual is being drafted to more clearly explain the aspects of the scheme that are the subject of multiple queries. The updated application form will be issued shortly, and the draft explanatory manual is currently being reviewed both internally and externally to ensure that it addresses the issues identified.

VAT Rate Application

35. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 94 of 22 February 2017, the status of his consultations with other member states in advance of the publication of the proposal regarding the reform of VAT rates in Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42716/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Commission is due to publish a proposal on the reform of VAT rates in November 2017, after which technical and political discussions on the proposal will commence at EU Council among all Member States.

Earlier in the year preliminary details of the proposed changes were discussed as part of the EU Commission's Group on the Future of VAT - a forum for consulting VAT experts from Member States on pre-legislative initiatives. Officials from my Department and the Revenue Commissioners contributed to these discussions.

Budget 2018

36. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the regulatory impact assessment he has carried out prior to tax changes he plans announcing in budget 2018. [42724/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that Budget tax changes are generally implemented by means of the Finance Bill. The Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) Guidelines advise that it is not compulsory to apply RIA to the Finance Bill. Indeed the Guidelines go on to note that the publication of an RIA may not be appropriate in the case of tax law / regulations or the imposition of charges because of their sensitivity and the need to guard against possible evasion or avoidance.

European Court of Human Rights Rulings

37. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the State has not collected the billions of euro due to it under a ruling (details supplied); his plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42743/17]

38. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the EU is, or is threatening to, take Ireland to court to force it to collect billions of euro owed to the State under a ruling (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42744/17]

39. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to date of advice received by his Department regarding the establishment of an escrow account in which to hold the billions of euro owed to the State as a result of a ruling (details supplied); the beneficiaries of such fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42745/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 37 to 39, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, on 4th October 2017 the European Commission announced its intention to refer Ireland to the European Court of Justice in respect of the recovery of the alleged State Aid. I am of the opinion that it is extremely disappointing that the Commission has taken action at this time against Ireland. My officials have been in constant contact with the European Commission on all aspects of this process for over a year.

While the Government has never accepted the Commission's analysis in the Apple State Aid decision, we have always been clear that we are fully committed to ensuring that recovery of the alleged Apple State Aid takes place without delay and has committed significant resources to ensuring that this is achieved as quickly as possible whilst ensuring that the interests of the Irish taxpayer are adequately protected.

Officials and experts from across the State have been engaged in intensive work to ensure that Ireland complies with all its recovery obligations as soon as possible. Significant progress has been made on this complex issue and the establishment of an escrow fund, in compliance with all relevant Irish constitutional and European Union law requirements, is close to completion.

With regard to the cost of advice in relation to the recovery process, over €1 million (including VAT) has been spent by the State (including the Department of Finance, the Revenue Commissioners, the Central Bank of Ireland, the Attorney General's Office and the Chief State Solicitor's Office). This case has involved a significant degree of legal and technical complexity, and additional expertise has been engaged where required. As it is an important issue for the State, the recovery process will continue to be appropriately resourced.

Ministerial Functions

40. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42780/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I indicated in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 84 of 27 September 2017, there are two Ministers of State appointed to the Department of Finance:

- Deputy Michael D'Arcy is Minister of State at the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for Financial Services and Insurance; and

- Deputy Patrick O'Donovan is Minister of State at the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for Public Procurement, Open Government and eGovernment.

No formal Delegation of Ministerial Functions Orders have been signed. This position is

kept under review in light of the requirements of the respective roles. There were no changes in powers delegated on or after 14 June 2017.

EU Treaties

41. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the proposal to enshrine the fiscal compact, now an inter government treaty, into the EU Treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42969/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following a referendum on the 31 May 2012, Ireland deposited its instruments of ratification of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in Economic and Monetary Union done at Brussels, 2 March 2012, with the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union on 14 December 2012.

At present, the European Commission has not brought forward any legislative proposal to enshrine the fiscal compact into an EU Treaty.

NAMA Portfolio

42. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the housing and commercial properties in the possession of NAMA in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42980/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA does not, in general, own property. Rather, NAMA acquired loans for which the properties act as security.

Under Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act, NAMA is prohibited from disclosing confidential debtor information, including information on the location and type of assets owned by debtors. It is therefore not possible to identify particular assets which secure NAMA loans in Co. Tipperary as to do so would identify the owners as NAMA debtors.

I am advised by NAMA that its debtors and receivers control only a small number of properties in Co. Tipperary; as at 31 December 2016, just 0.05% (€586k) of the remaining NAMA-secured property portfolio was located in Co. Tipperary.

Public Sector Pensions

43. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance if calculations have been carried out on the tax foregone by not taxing accruing public sector pensions; the reason for not including such estimates in a future tax expenditure review in view of the fact that both public and private sector beneficiaries avail of tax relief in order to have a more accurate picture of the cost of pension provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43003/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): With some minor exceptions, public sector pensions are paid from current expenditure and specific funds are not maintained. There is no capacity therefore to tax or to derive estimates of notional taxation foregone. The practice of calculating tax foregone on private pension fund accumulation relates to the fact that there are a several such funds.

Vehicle Registration

44. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance if the VRT grant for fully hybrid vehicles of €1,500 will be extended to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43026/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is the long-standing practice of Ministers for Finance not to comment on what may be contained in upcoming budgets.

Rent Controls

45. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if a company (details supplied) can avail of the rent a room relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42213/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The rent a room relief was introduced with the aim of increasing the availability of rented residential accommodation. The room or rooms must be used for the purposes of residential accommodation, i.e. the occupants are effectively using the room on a long-term basis, either on its own or in conjunction with other parts of the residence, as a home. The relief does not apply to rooms that are used for business purposes.

Under the scheme, sums arising to an individual in respect of the letting, for residential purposes, of a room or rooms in his or her home, including, for example, sums arising from lettings to students for an academic year, and the provision of meals or other services supplied in connection with the letting, may be exempt from income tax where they meet the conditions of the scheme and where the individual's total gross income from such letting(s) is below the annual limit for the tax year in question. This limit was increased to €14,000 with effect from the 2017 tax year.

Income from the provision of accommodation to occasional visitors for short periods, including, for example, where the accommodation is provided through online accommodation booking sites, does not qualify for relief as the visitors use the accommodation as guest accommodation rather than for residential purposes. The tax treatment of such income is dependent on the nature of the accommodation irrespective of whether or not this is arranged through an internet letting platform or other form of intermediary.

I am not favourably disposed to the extension of rent-a-room relief to income earned from the provision of accommodation through platforms such as the company in question, I am mindful such an extension could lead to unfair competition in the guest accommodation sector generally, by placing B&B and guest house operators who provide accommodation in the course of a trade at an unfair disadvantage.

Financial Services Ombudsman Remit

46. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if, in relation to the complaints process of the Financial Services Ombudsman and in general when a person is making a complaint to a financial service provider, he will ensure that a legal personal representative of an estate is in no way treated differently to a person that is alive, including in the right to access all files and documents relevant to such a complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42214/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on how he performs those duties.

The Financial Services Ombudsman deals independently with complaints from consumers about their dealings with financial service providers. Any private individual or any business, club, charity, partnership or trust with a turnover of less than €3 million per year may make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman. A legal personal representative may submit a complaint to the Financial Service Ombudsman on behalf of a deceased's estate. The Financial Service Ombudsman has confirmed that once it has been established that the person bringing the complaint is the legal personal representative, these complaints are handled in the normal manner and in accordance with the usual procedures.

On the issue more generally, the Central Bank has informed me that Chapter 10 of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 ('the Code') sets out how regulated firms must handle complaints received from consumers. While provision 3.7 of the Code sets out how a regulated entity must deal with a person acting under a power of attorney, the Code does not include any specific requirements on dealing with persons with legal authority to act on behalf of a deceased consumer.

VAT Rate Application

47. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to retain the 9% VAT rate for businesses involved in tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42231/17]

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

Tax Code

48. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) living in Portugal cannot avail of the NHR status enabling those that become tax resident in Portugal the opportunity to receive qualifying income tax free both in Portugal and in the country of the source of income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42270/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it is not their practice to comment on the application of the provisions of the national law of other countries. I am also advised that if the Deputy supplies identifying detail in respect of the person and specifies the source of income concerned, or the individual contacts Revenue with details of his circumstances and the income concerned, Revenue will advise in relation to the application of the Ireland-Portugal Double Taxation Convention to that income.

EU Issues

49. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the action he is taking at EU level to promote the need for persons living in one EU member state to be allowed to purchase financial services products such as home loans and business loans from financial institutions based in other EU member states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42280/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The EU treaties provide for the free movement of capital and services between EU Member States. As part of this EU common market for financial services, the “passporting” provisions in the Capital Requirements Directive IV (as transposed in Ireland through the European Union (Capital Requirements) Regulations 2014 - SI 158/2014), enable a licensed credit institution in another EEA jurisdiction to offer banking services/products to Irish residents. (In this context it should be noted that all Central Bank consumer protection requirements apply equally to credit institutions ‘passporting’ in from another EEA member state as they do to an Irish incorporated credit institution.) Likewise, there is no general restriction on Irish residents obtaining banking services/products from non-Irish credit institutions.

However, despite these free movement provisions differences remain between the credit and financial markets of Member States, and the EU has taken some further steps to more positively promote a closer level of convergence of such markets and associated services through the approximation of certain laws and the establishment of certain standards in the provision of services, consistent with a high level of consumer protection. For example, the 2014 Mortgage Credit Directive (as transposed in Ireland by the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 - SI 142/2016) provides for common minimum (and in some instances maximum) standards and requirements in the provision of residential mortgage credit (and also in the provision of mortgage credit intermediation services) to consumer borrowers in the EU and the 2008 Consumer Credit Directive (as transposed in Ireland by the European Communities (Consumer Credit Agreements) Regulations 2010 - SI 281/2010 as amended) provides for a similar common framework in respect of unsecured consumer lending. Also the EU Payment Accounts Directive (as transposed by the European Union (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016) and the SEPA Regulation (EU Regulation No 260/2012) have been enacted, with the latter providing that a payment account in any Member State can be used for credit transfers and direct debits in any other Member State.

Also, in 2015 the European Commission launched its Capital Markets Union Action Plan that set out a programme of 33 measures, focused on 6 objectives, which aim to establish the building blocks of an integrated capital market in the European Union (EU) by 2019. Solid groundwork has been completed to underpin proposals to encourage retail investment EU-wide, such as the recent legislative proposal on pan-European personal pensions.

However, the level and scope for the further integration of credit and financial markets is being kept under review. Specifically in relation to mortgages, the Mortgage Credit Directive requires the European Commission to consider the effectiveness and appropriateness of the provisions on consumers and on the internal market by 2019. More generally, it could be noted that last March the Commission also presented its Consumer Financial Services Action Plan and this sets out further possible ways to provide consumers of financial services with greater choice and better access to retail financial services across the EU.

VAT Rate Reductions

50. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a VAT reduction on animal vaccines in order to help support better animal welfare on farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42281/17]

55. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reduce the rate of VAT on animal vaccines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42362/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50

and 55 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Retail Sector

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of transactions in retail outlets across the country in which persons pay with a debit or credit card; the arrangements in relation to the transaction fees that apply to the retailers facilitating such electronic transactions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42282/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that it does not collect data on the percentage of transactions in retail outlets where individuals pay with a debit or credit card, or on the transaction fees that apply to retailers accepting electronic payment transactions.

In terms of fees paid by retailers, in order to be able to accept payment cards a retailer appoints an acquiring company and agrees a merchant service charge with that company. The amount of the merchant service charge varies, often depending on the volume of card transactions the retailer accepts.

Budget 2016 introduced measures to support retailers by reducing costs and incentivising electronic payments. Changes were made to the interchange fees faced by retailers accepting cards, including halving the interchange fees for domestic consumer debit cards to 10 basis points - one of the lowest rates in the EU. Those changes came into effect on 9 December 2015 and reduced the costs of accepting card payments, as interchange fees make up part of the merchant service charge collected by acquirers from retailers.

The Central Bank does provide other credit and debit card statistics, including the number of debit and credit cards currently in issue to Irish residents, and these are available on the website of the Central Bank. In addition, the Banking and Payments Federation of Ireland produces a payments monitor which is available on its website.

Both of these sources of information evidence strong growth in the use electronic payments, particularly debit cards. The number of debit cards stood at 4,779,448 and the number of credit cards at 1,882,938 in August 2017. The latest Central Bank credit and debit card statistical release shows that debit card point-of-sale transactions, at €2.9 billion in June 2017, were 16 per cent higher than the same month in 2016 while credit card point of sale transactions were 5 per cent higher than in the same period in 2016.

Lobbying Data

52. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42291/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since March 2016, my Department has received nine Representations from a number of organisations regarding the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, as follows:

- IBEC
- Hume Brophy
- Responsible Retailing of Alcohol in Ireland – 3 Reprs received
- Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland
- Alcohol Health Alliance – forwarded to Department of Health for direct response
- Q4 PR
- HSE West - forwarded to Department of Health for direct response

This correspondence was dealt with at Official level.

My Special Adviser has also received representations on this issue.

I have not attended any meetings regarding the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. I am informed that my predecessor did not attend any such meetings in the timeframe indicated.

Meetings that took place at Official level did not have designated officers present from the perspective of the Lobbying Act. Meetings with Designated Public Officials are required to be registered on the Register of Lobbying and are publicly available at <https://www.lobbying.ie/>.

Banking Sector

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the legacy losses outstanding from a tax perspective in banks (details supplied); the length of time into the future these losses can be carried forward to reduce tax; if an analysis has been carried out on the effect on the banks of restricting the losses that can be brought forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42308/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): S396c was a provision introduced by the NAMA Act 2009 which limited the amount of trading losses incurred by a NAMA participating bank that could be set-off against future trading profits. The set-off was limited to 50% of the profit in any given year. It did not disallow any tax losses from being utilised but instead lengthened the period over which they could be used. Section 396C was introduced as a form of claw-back for the taxpayer.

However, with the introduction of the new capital rules on 1 January 2014 under CRD IV and the State having acquired ownership positions in the banks, it no longer served its original purpose and accordingly, in the Finance Act 2014, the Minister for Finance deemed it appropriate to remove the provision. The removal of Section 396C put the covered banks in the same position as other corporates including other banks operating in Ireland. Indeed I would highlight for the Deputy that the provision which allows the carry-forward of tax losses for set-off against future trading profits is available not only for banks but for all Irish corporates. This is a standard tax policy internationally.

In relation to the impact on the banks of changing the treatment losses that can be brought forward, I can confirm that an analysis was carried out in late 2013 as part of the preparations for the Finance Bill 2014 when S396c of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 was repealed.

To recognise the part that the banks played in the financial crisis, in 2013, the Government also decided that the banking sector should make an annual contribution of approximately €150

million to the Exchequer for the period from 2014 to 2016. In Budget 2016, the payment of this levy was extended until 2021. The bank levy is expected to raise €750 million over the five years.

My Department requested that each of the banks to respond to the Deputy's query and received the following information.

Bank of Ireland:

“In 2016, the Group paid taxes of €263m to the Irish State and collected taxes of €858m on behalf of the Irish State. In the first six months of 2017, the Group paid taxes of €96m to the Irish State and collected taxes of €455m on behalf of the Irish State. Note 19 on page 81 of the published Interim Report for the six months ended 30 June 2017 contains the Group's disclosures on the deferred tax asset that has been recognised in respect of historical trading losses. At 30 June 2017, deferred tax assets include an amount of €1,251 million in respect of tax losses which are available to relieve future profits from tax. Of these losses, approximately €1.1 billion relates to Irish tax losses and €0.1 billion relates to UK tax losses. It is currently projected that the deferred tax asset in respect of tax losses will be recovered in full by the end of 2038.

“The deferred tax assets have been recognised on the basis that it is probable the tax losses will be recovered as the Directors are satisfied that it is probable that the Group will have sufficient future taxable profits against which the deferred tax assets can be utilised. Under current Irish and UK tax legislation there is no time restriction on the utilisation of trading losses.”

AIB:

“Information in relation to AIB's Deferred Tax Asset are contained on Pages 257-259 and Pages 296–298 of the 2016 Annual Financial Report and Page 115 of the 2017 Half-Yearly Financial Report. At 31 December 2016, AIB Group recognised deferred tax assets of €2,928 million arising from unused Irish tax losses. No deferred tax assets were recognised in respect of other unused Irish tax losses of €122 million.

“Under Irish tax legislation, there is no limit on the period of time for which any company can carry forward losses incurred in its trade for offset against future profits for the same trade.

“Notwithstanding that AIB is carrying forward large amounts of trade tax losses, it also pays significant amounts of tax in Ireland such as the bank levy, corporation tax on capital gains and on non-trading income, irrecoverable VAT on purchases, and employer's PRSI. In addition, it remits to the Revenue taxes collected from others including PAYE, USC and PRSI relating to its c. 10,000 employees.”

PTSB:

“As noted in PTSB's 2016 Annual Report, the PTSB Group recognised a deferred tax asset on tax losses carried forward of €373m at 31 December 2016. This equates to tax losses of c. €2.98bn. The Group has estimated that it will take c. 22 years for the tax losses to be utilised.”

Tax Credits

54. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the earned income tax credit to the same level as the PAYE credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42360/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Earned Income Credit was in-

roduced in Budget 2016 and then increased in Budget 2017. The tax credit is available to taxpayers with active self-employed trading or professional income and to business owners or managers who do not have access to the PAYE credit on employment income from their business. The credit provides a significant benefit to small business-owners right across the country including small retailers, publicans, farmers and tradesmen. It is estimated that approximately 147,500 income earners are currently in a position to benefit from the credit.

In Budget 2017, the Earned Income Credit was increased in value from €550 to €950.

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.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 50.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Investigations

56. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement or the Financial Regulator has carried out investigations into a company (details supplied) regarding the way in which it has operated and dealt with persons that gave it funds for investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42376/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement is under the aegis of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Furthermore, section 949(3) of the Companies Act 2014 provides that the Director of Corporate Enforcement shall be independent in the performance of his statutory functions. Therefore, I, as Minister for Finance, have no direct function in such matters.

I am informed by the Central Bank that based on the information as supplied by the Deputy, it would appear that this firm is not regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

The Central Bank publishes Registers of all the firms and individuals authorised by the Central Bank on its website. Under EU law, some firms may be allowed to operate in Ireland without being authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland. Such firms are regulated by their home state, although the Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for some regulation in the Consumer Protection area, known as conduct of business rules. These firms may not appear on the Registers. Furthermore, not all financial service providers require regulation by the Central Bank (for example, credit intermediaries authorised by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission).

It is a criminal offence for an unauthorised firm/person to provide financial services in Ireland that would require an authorisation under the relevant legislation which the Central Bank is the responsible body for enforcing.

Consumers should be aware, that if they deal with a firm/person who is not authorised, they will not have access to the following protections:

- Investor compensation schemes
- The services of the Financial Services Ombudsman
- The Directors and senior management of unauthorised firms are not subject to the Fitness and Probity Regime
- Unauthorised firms are not subject to prudential requirements such as regulatory capital

requirements or safeguarding of client funds

Under the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013, the Central Bank has the authority to publish warning notices naming persons or firms who are providing financial services without the appropriate authorisation or who are holding themselves out to be a regulated financial service provider where they do not have the appropriate authorisation to provide financial services. The Central Bank also publishes a list of unauthorised firms in respect of whom warning notices have been published.

Any person wishing to contact the Central Bank with information regarding unauthorised firms/persons may telephone (01) 224 4000. This telephone line is also available to the public to check whether a firm is authorised.

Tax Code

57. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps his Department and the Revenue Commissioners have taken in order to be prepared for the introduction of a sugar tax in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42433/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following the announcement in Budget 2017 of the introduction of a tax on sugar-sweetened drinks in April 2018, a public consultation was opened until 3 January this year. The consultation invited interested stakeholders to make submissions in relation to the design, scope and practical implementation issues of the tax. Thirty submissions were received, the majority of which came from the health sector and soft drinks industry. These informed the development of the tax.

To further assist with the development of the tax, an implementation team composed of officials from Revenue and my Department was established together with a steering committee with representatives from Revenue, Department of Health and my Department.

Extensive stakeholder engagement took place throughout the process to take into account industry views on the design of the tax. This included site visits to manufacturing plants, face to face meetings at a variety of levels, and a number of technical consultations concerning specifics of the tax. A channel of communication with industry remains open in relation to technical implementation matters.

Engagement with the European Commission was established to ensure compatibility of the tax, when implemented, with EU State aid law. Similarly, discussions have taken place on a variety of policy and implementation issues with the UK public authorities, the Treasury and HMRC, as the UK will also introduce a similar tax commencing in April 2018. Again, this channel remains open.

As well as being engaged with the above, Revenue has carried out the following preparatory steps for the introduction of a Sugar Sweetened Drink (SSD) tax:

- Engagement with the State Laboratory and Food Safety Authority of Ireland on product classification and labelling issues relating to the identification of products liable to the proposed tax;
- Development of draft legislative provisions that would be required to support the proposed tax;
- Development of proposals on Revenue IT infrastructure, payments processing and other tax administration, accounting and collection issues relating to the proposed tax.

Tax Reliefs Data

58. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the level of uptake to date on the improved CGT entrepreneur relief introduced in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42434/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that as the change to Capital Gains Tax entrepreneur relief took effect from 1 January 2017 and, as the tax returns for 2017 are not due to be filed until late 2018, it is not possible to provide information in respect of the level of uptake at this time.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received the approval of the European Commission for the introduction of a share based incentive scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42435/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, on a foot of a review of share based remuneration conducted in 2016, it was announced in the Budget 2017 that work had commenced on the development of a new, SME-focused, share-based incentive scheme, to be introduced in Budget 2018.

It was noted that such an incentive would require the approval of the European Commission and that officials would be engaging with the Commission to ensure that the incentive would comply with State Aid rules. This process has been ongoing throughout the year and is expected to conclude in the near future.

The Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss in advance the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill. It is my intention to provide further information in the context of the Budget.

Budget 2017

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the work that has been done since the announcement in budget 2017 on the possible introduction of a VAT compensation scheme for registered charities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42436/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following the Budget 2017 announcement by my predecessor, officials of my Department re-engaged with the Charities Institute to examine options in this regard.

However, the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Excise Duties Yield

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the excise duty on tobacco products collected in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the estimated amount to be collected in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42437/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the excise duty collected on tobacco products in the years 2014 to 2016 is available on the Revenue's website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/excise/net-receipts-by-commodity.pdf>.

The estimate for the Excise to be collected on tobacco products in 2017 is €1,200 million.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

62. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of approved applications under the help-to-buy scheme to date in 2017; the estimated cost of the scheme in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42438/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that statistics on the Help To Buy (HTB) scheme are available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/htb.aspx>.

These statistics, which are updated on a monthly basis (mostly recently at end September), provide a range of information in respect of the scheme, including the number of approved applications and the estimated total cost of approved HTB claims to date.

As of 29 September, the number of applications received for the Help to Buy Incentive (HTB) was 10,547, of which 7,341 have been approved. Some 4,088 claims have been made, of which 3,451 have been approved.

The estimated total value of approved HTB claims to date is in the order of €49.4 million, of which €15.2 million represent retrospective claims (for the period 19 July to 31 December 2016).

At the time of Budget 2017, it was estimated that the HTB scheme would cost €40 million per annum but €50 million in 2017 due to the backdating of the relief in respect of properties which became eligible for the scheme since 19 July 2016. Currently, the estimate of €40 million for claims relating to 2017 remains valid.

Budget Measures

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount to be collected in 2017 from the compliance measures specified in the summary of budget measures 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42439/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Budget 2017 specified three compliance measures: amendments in relation to Section 110 and fund changes (projected yield of €50 million), tackling offshore tax evasion (€30 million) and increased resources for Revenue to confront non-compliance (€50 million).

I am informed by Revenue that it is too early to accurately assess the impact of, or collection under, these headings for 2017. This will not be possible until after the end of the year. I am however advised that Revenue expects the target will be exceeded based on evidence to date. This includes €79 million collected from disclosures in relation to offshore assets.

Revenue will undertake detailed analysis of the Budget 2017 measures when data are available.

Central Bank of Ireland

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of regulation in the Central Bank per year in the past five years; the portion of these costs obtained from levies on financial institutions; his plans for the funding model for regulation at the Central Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42440/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Sections 32D and 32E of the Central Bank Act 1942 (as amended by the Central Bank Reform Act 2010), provide that the Central Bank Commission may make regulations prescribing levies and fees to be paid by entities subject to regulation by the Central Bank, subject to my approval as Minister for Finance.

The annual Industry Funding Levy is designed to recoup, directly from regulated entities, the relevant proportion of the budgeted cost of regulation for the year in question. The balance is funded by the public by means of subvention from the Central Bank. In previous years, there has been a 50:50 funding contribution model, with industry funding approximately 50% of the costs of financial regulation, and the remainder being funded by a subvention from the Central Bank.

The Central Bank of Ireland publishes the guide to Industry Funding Levies on an annual basis. The 2017 Funding Levies are due to be published shortly. The cost of regulation and the income from the levy for 2012 – 2016 (as per the annual financial statements of the Central Bank) are as follows:

	Cost of Regulation	Industry Levy Income
2016	€155.1m	€73.3m*
2015	€146.7m	€67.7m*
2014	€139.4m	€75.8m*
2013	€128.0m	€69.7m
2012	€110.7m	€65.2m

*Excludes deferred levy income arising from spreading the impact of pension volatility over a rolling 10 year period

This year, the contribution by industry to the Central Bank's overall cost of financial regulation will be 65%, for most industry categories, with the remainder to be funded by public subvention by the Bank.

This move to 65% funding follows a period of review and public consultation on funding the costs of financial regulation, by my Department and the Central Bank which has taken place over several years. A joint feedback statement to the public consultation was published on 28 September 2017. The press release and joint feedback statement are available at the following link: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/updates/department-of-finance-and-central-bank-publish-feedback-statement-to-joint-public-consultation-paper-on-funding-the-cost-of-financial-regulation/>

NAMA Social Housing Provision

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received approval from the European Commission to reform NAMA in order to allow it to develop social and affordable housing on State-owned land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42444/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA

is a wind down vehicle, which is repaying its debt and maximising the value of its remaining assets.

There are valuable expertise and skills in NAMA which may have a role to play in future housing delivery. Work is ongoing in considering how this expertise may be best utilised, giving due cognisance to the various legislative, balance sheet and State aid implications of any such proposals. Since this work is ongoing, no approval has been sought from the European Commission with regard to the Deputy's question.

Excessive Deficit Procedure Implementation

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the State's final structural deficit in percentage terms in 2016; and if he expects changes at this point. [42445/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The estimated structural deficit for 2016 was -1.4 per cent of GDP, as published in the Summer Economic Statement 2017.

As the structural balance is a function of the general government balance (GGB), it may be updated should the Central Statistics Office revise the GGB in its October Excessive Deficit Procedure transmission to Eurostat. The structural balance is also a function of the estimated output gap in 2016 and this will change over time.

An update will be provided in the Budget 2018 documents

Data Collection

67. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the public service records management plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42699/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In July this year I brought a joint memorandum to Government on behalf of myself and Minister Humphreys seeking approval of a Public Service Records Management Plan. The Government has approved this plan, which is to be implemented by the National Archives with the support of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The plan is to be carried out over three years and aims to achieve the following high level objectives.

Timeframe	Objective
Short-term	To give direction to public bodies with regard to records management
Short-term	To reduce spend on offsite storage for records not meriting long term preservation
Short-term	To produce a framework by which public service bodies can implement electronic systems for the efficient and effective management of digital records
Long-term	To develop capacity and capability within the public service with regard to records management and increasingly electronic records management
Long-term	To develop capability and capacity in the National Archives to accession and preserve digital records

Officials from the National Archives and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform continue to meet regarding this plan and its execution, and are currently working through the initiation phase of the project, putting in place the necessary resources required to implement the plan over the next three years.

Flood Prevention Measures

68. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider in conjunction with relevant Departments and other agencies introducing a pilot initiative for the clearance and upkeep of water courses, channels, streams and rivers in areas subject to flooding and or prone to future flooding in an effort to avoid future flooding in areas of poor drainage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42860/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Maintenance of rivers and other watercourses can have a positive role to play in preventing the deterioration of channel conveyance capacity. A regular maintenance programme to remove excess inorganic material, vegetation and/or remove debris and rubbish from river channels, and ensure that culvert screens are kept clear, can help reduce flood levels during flood events.

However, international evidence and expertise shows that maintenance on its own is not going to protect towns and would have had no beneficial effect on extreme flood events as experienced recently in Donegal. That being said, it is recognised that maintenance can assist in mitigating against the effects of less severe flood events and summer flooding.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) carries out a programme of Arterial Drainage Maintenance to a total of 11,500 km of river channel and approximately 730 km of embankments nationally. These maintenance works relate to arterial drainage schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. The OPW has a statutory duty to maintain the completed schemes in proper repair and effective condition. The annual maintenance programme typically involves some clearance of vegetation and removal of silt build-up on an average five-yearly cycle. Each year, work is carried out to approximately 2,000 km of channel and about 200 structures around the country. Maintenance of all drainage schemes carried out under earlier Acts, known as Drainage Districts, is the responsibility of the relevant Local Authority.

In order to explore how state agencies can come together to address maintenance issues, the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group agreed to carry out some targeted maintenance activity. During September, works were carried out at the first of a series of locations on the River Shannon to remove silt and vegetation to enhance the conveyance capacity and navigation.

The current priorities of the OPW are to publish and implement Flood Risk Management Plans to address significant flood risk for 300 communities throughout Ireland and to deliver the capital investment programme of major flood defences that will protect thousands of properties during severe flood events. The OPW will continue to provide important funding to Local Authorities to deal with localised flooding issues through the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme.

Heritage Sites

69. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of complaints received from the unions and safety representatives based at a location (details supplied); the nature of the complaints; his plans to deal with the matters raised; if there is a basic maintenance plan in operation at the site; if the staff toilets and public toilets are adequate and up to standard; the amount of money spent on the provision of an apartment in the location for a caretaker; if the apartment is in use; the cost of security at the site; his views on

whether the staff levels including groundsmen are adequate; if he is satisfied with the management structure at the location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42463/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Kilkenny Castle, one of our nation's most celebrated historic properties, attracts circa 308,000 paying visitors annually and many multiples of this number visit the parkland.

As with all busy visitor attractions, a wide variety of issues can arise which require ongoing dialogue between staff and management. The management of Kilkenny Castle engages in a timely and proactive manner with staff in relation to all concerns including Health and Safety issues. In the last twelve months, management at the Castle has received two formal communications from a Shop Steward and a Safety Representative. The issues raised ranged from day-to-day operational matters to application of annual leave entitlements for seasonal staff. Management has responded comprehensively to all of the issues raised to date.

There is a detailed maintenance plan for both the Castle and the Parkland which ensures the site is presented for our visitors to OPW's high standards. Toilet facilities for both staff and visitors are considered adequate with reference to staffing and visitor numbers and this is reviewed annually.

The apartment at the Castle was provided as part of Phase 3 of the Castle restoration project which was completed in May 2000. No further investment has been made in this area of the Castle since. The apartment is deemed unsuitable for use on Health and Safety grounds due to its location (on the top floor of the West Tower, accessed via a Medieval spiral staircase with the only emergency evacuation route being over the roof battlements.)

The safety and security of Kilkenny Castle, its contents and the surrounding parkland is an absolute priority for the OPW and security arrangements are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Security expenditure to date in 2017 is €65.661.95.

Staffing requirements at all OPW heritage sites are regularly reviewed with reference to operations and visitor figures as part of our Work Force Planning. The management and staff structure at Kilkenny Castle is in line with all other OPW National Historic Properties.

Public Sector Pay

70. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether PeoplePoint has sufficient resources to process all the incoming information; the number of persons in the Civil

Service waiting on salary adjustments; the length of time they are waiting; if this delay is in accordance with the Payment of Wages Act 1991; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42478/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All payments are made with regard to the provisions of Payment of Wages Acts.

There are approximately six hundred pay adjustment cases with PeoplePoint related to acting up allowances, assignment to higher scale and pay on promotion, of which 50% are over thirty days old.

A specialist team is dedicated to progressing the abovementioned cases. It is expected all pay instructions will have issued to the pay centre within the period of six weeks

Superannuation Schemes

71. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it is a breach of the Employment Equality Acts in relation to terms and conditions of employment on the ground of disability to oblige disabled civil servants to be members of the 1984 Civil Service (Spouses and Children's) Superannuation Scheme in view of the 2002 IPA report on the employment and career progression of civil servants with a disability in the civil service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42484/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Civil Service Spouses' and Children's Scheme is a contributory scheme, membership of which is compulsory for men appointed on or after 1 January 1969 and women appointed on or after 1 June 1981. Men and women serving prior to the relevant dates were given options to join the scheme. The original scheme provides pensions for the spouse and/or dependent children of a member or eligible dependent children of a member who dies in service, or after qualifying for pension (or preserved pension). It does not provide pensions for spouses of marriages occurring after retirement or children resulting from such marriages. Following discussions with staff interests, a further option was given to all officers in 1984 to join the revised spouses' and children's scheme. This covers the spouses of post-retirement marriages and all of the member's children.

The Commission on Public Service Pensions, which examined a range of public service pension issues in its 2000 report, concluded that:

'The spouses' and children's contributory pension schemes are key components in the public service pension system. We consider that the former, in particular, have proved to be one of the more important developments in public service pensions policy over the last 30 years. Through public service spouses' and children's schemes, it has been possible to provide for the surviving family members of public servants when they die after retirement or while in public service employment. As well as meeting an important social need, the schemes have helped ensure a degree of financial security and peace of mind for individual public servants and for their dependants.'

The Pensions Commission stated that it accepted the view that public service spouses' and children's schemes are structured on a group insurance basis and that member contribution rates take account of the fact that payment of benefits will not arise in respect of all members.

I am satisfied that the Civil Service Spouses' and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme meets the requirements of the Employment Equality Acts, 1998 – 2015 in relation to all of the grounds of discrimination set out in the legislation, including on grounds of disability.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

72. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the planning permissions for communication masts on sites need to be regularised to comply with planning regulations in instances in which a Garda station has been closed; the number of Garda communication masts that have been decommissioned and disposed of; if costs have been incurred as part of the decommissioning; if so, the details of the costs by station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42494/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Under the terms of the licences granted by the Commissioners of Public Works (OPW) to third parties in relation to the installation of telecommunications equipment on the masts at Garda Stations, compliance with planning is the responsibility of the Licensee. Of the 139 Garda Stations closed in recent years, 17 of the associated telecommunications masts were licensed to third parties, including 10 sites to Tetra Ireland Limited for the provision of digital radio services. Tetra Ireland Ltd provide the national system for emergency services communications of which An Garda Síochána (AGS) is a primary user.

Decommissioning of telecommunications equipment is a matter for the owner of the equipment, whether it be AGS or mobile phone operators. OPW is then responsible for the removal of the mast and one such mast has been removed at Cloghane, Co. Kerry at a cost of €5,551.

The planning status of masts at the remaining stations will be reviewed when the ongoing review of closed Garda Stations is complete.

Proposed Legislation

73. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which the Data Sharing and Governance Bill will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42513/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The draft general scheme of the Data Sharing and Governance Bill was approved by Government and published in August 2015. The purpose of the Bill is to promote and encourage data sharing between public bodies by providing a statutory framework for data sharing for legitimate and clearly specified purposes that are compliant with data protection law; and to improve the protection of individual privacy rights by setting new governance standards for data sharing by public bodies.

Pre-legislative scrutiny hearings on the Bill were held in April and May 2017 by the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach with officials from my Department and the Department of Justice, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and representatives of civil society groups with an interest in the area of digital rights and data protection. The Committee published its report in July 2017.

Work is well underway on the drafting of the Bill, which will be informed by the findings and recommendations contained in the Committee's report. The Bill must also take into account the provisions of the EU General Data Protection Regulation, which was published in April 2016 and comes into effect on 25 May 2018, as well as the October 2015 ruling of the European Court of Justice in the case of Smaranda Bara and Others, which sets out certain criteria for the lawful sharing of data by public bodies.

I intend to submit the text of the Bill to Government for approval to publish and commence passage through the Oireachtas by the end of this year or shortly thereafter.

National Monuments

74. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the arrangements in place for visitors to the homestead of the 1916 signatory Seán Mac Diarmada; the months, days of the week and opening hours of the monument; his plans to extend these

hours; the amount of publicity dedicated to the homestead by the Office of Public Works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42587/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Sean Mac Dhiarmada Cottage is a National Monument in State care and is managed and maintained by the Office of Public Works.

Visitor access to the Cottage is currently feasible on a pre-arranged basis only. The OPW made arrangements in 2016 for a local Heritage Centre in Kiltyclogher to be made keyholders for the property to facilitate this and also supported the Centre financially in the employment of a TÚS worker to lead Guide Services to the Cottage as part of the Year of Commemoration. Currently, in the absence of a local response initially, anyone requiring access to the site must contact the OPW at Dromahair.

As the OPW does not itself participate in the direct delivery of Guide services at this site. However it is not in a position to give details in relation to the timing or frequency of tours and it is not currently involved in any marketing of the site; however, it was the general understanding that during 2016, the Centre made tours available on demand during normal working hours in the summer months as required by visitor arrivals in their facility in Kiltyclogher.

The Centre was not in a position to provide services to the Cottage in 2017 and is currently closed. The OPW remains open to the possibility of assisting a local initiative at the site and has indicated publicly recently that funding support options remain available. The OPW has also indicated that it will support initiatives such as publication distribution, creating an online presence and any other measures designed to increase awareness of the property.

Civil Service Staff Data

75. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of principal officer grade positions in the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42679/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The latest reconciled figures relating to end-Q2 2017 are that there were 771 serving Principal Officers at end June 2017 (in full-time equivalent or FTE terms), made up of 472 FTEs serving at PO standard, and 299 FTEs serving at PO higher.

Civil Service Staff Data

76. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of Secretary General, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Principal (Higher) Officer grade positions in the Civil Service respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42680/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy on the numbers of personnel serving in particular senior grades in the Civil Service is set out in the table below (in full-time equivalent or FTE terms).

Grade	Serving Numbers
Secretary General	27
Deputy Secretary	11

Grade	Serving Numbers
Assistant Secretary	135
Principal Higher	299

Civil Service Staff Data

77. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of positions above Principal Officer grade in the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42681/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On the basis of the latest reconciled data which relates to end-Q2 2017, there were a total of 269 (full-time equivalent) personnel serving in grades above Principal Officer in the Civil Service. These include officers in the grades of Secretary General, Second Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Second Secretary, plus officers serving in positions equivalent to these grades, for example Chief Parliamentary Counsel (equivalent to Secretary General), or Chief Medical Officer (equivalent to Deputy Secretary).

Ministerial Functions

78. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42785/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are three Ministers of State appointed to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform:

- Deputy Patrick O'Donovan is Minister of State at the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for Public Procurement, Open Government and eGovernment;

- Deputy Michael D'Arcy is Minister of State at the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for Financial Services and Insurance; and

- Deputy Kevin "Boxer" Moran is Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works and Flood Relief.

No formal Delegation of Ministerial Functions Orders have been signed. This position is kept under review in light of the requirements of the respective roles. There were no changes in powers delegated on or after 14 June 2017.

Departmental Budgets

79. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding his Department's gender-proofing departmental budgeting processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42851/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Pro-

gramme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. This is also a commitment that has been included in The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.

A policy paper prepared by my Department in relation to equality budgeting is being published today alongside the Expenditure Report. This paper sets out the pilot approach that will be adopted for gender budgeting in the Budget 2018 budgetary cycle anchored in the performance budgeting framework. In developing the pilot approach my Department has extensively reviewed international best practice in this area, and has had ongoing engagement with IHREC and the National Women's Council, as well as drawing on best international practice in other OECD countries.

In preparation for the introduction of a pilot programme of gender budgeting my Department has hosted a workshop focused on gender budgeting which was attended by officials from across the Civil Service. The workshop aimed to familiarise participants with the concept of gender budgeting and to provide them with tools to identify a gender perspective and to gender proof policies. Further work to embed the skills and capacity required for gender budgeting across the Civil Service will be ongoing during the course of the year.

Flood Relief Schemes

80. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if persons (details supplied) in County Kerry can be relocated in view of the persistent flooding problem at their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42864/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): On April 11 2017, the Government agreed the administrative arrangements for a Homeowners Voluntary Relocation Scheme for those primary residential properties that flooded during 4 December 2015 to 13 January 13 2016. This is a national scheme of humanitarian assistance, targeting aid at those worst affected properties, for which there are no alternative feasible measures.

The Government decision confirmed that a homeowner had to meet a number of conditions to be eligible for assistance under this scheme, including:

- That floodwater entered and damaged the building during the relevant dates such as to render it uninhabitable.
- That the property was the homeowners primary residence at the time of the floods.
- That the affected property must have a significant probability of the recurrence of the flood depth, duration or frequency on a scale that could cause further serious and similar damage to the home.
- That the property is not due to or may not benefit from a planned or possible future major, minor or individual flood defence scheme.
- That the property may not be protected adequately from being flooded in the future at an economically feasible cost through other flood mitigation works including minor works, individual property protection or other possible measures that can be considered at this time.
- That the homeowner is unable to obtain flood risk insurance.

The OPW are working with each of the Local Authorities, using their extensive and detailed local knowledge, to identify the homes that flooded during the event, and of those identified which properties may not benefit from a known or possible engineering solution. These homeowners will be invited to meet with the OPW to discuss the details of the scheme and may be invited to formally apply for the scheme. It is expected that contact will begin with the identified homeowners in the coming weeks.

In addition to the identification process underway with the local authorities, homeowners also had the opportunity to express an interest directly with the OPW, before 28 July 2017, to be considered under the Scheme. Some 67 expressions of interest were received from homeowners in 19 different local authority areas. The details of these properties has been shared with the local authorities for their consideration in the stage 1 desktop assessment.

The homeowner referred to by the Deputy did not express an interest in the Scheme directly with the OPW. The local authority have identified a property in the area that flooded during the relevant dates but they are currently unable to confirm if it is the same property referred to by the Deputy.

Public Sector Pay

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform what pay rises public servants are due to receive under the Lansdowne Road Agreement and its recently agreed successor, by salary bands and dates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42919/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Stability Agreement runs from 2018- 2020 and has a cost over that period of €887 million. The overall benefits to different income groups range from 7.4 per cent to 6.2 per cent over three years.

Pay increases under the agreement are scheduled as follows:

2018

- 1st January annualised salaries to increase by 1%;
- 1st October annualised salaries to increase by 1%.

2019

- 1st January annualised salaries up to €30,000 to increase by 1%;
- 1st September annualised salaries to increase by 1.75%.

2020

- 1st January annualised salaries up to €32,000 to increase by 0.5%;
- 1st October annualised salaries to increase by 2%.

10 October 2017

A full breakdown of resulting salary benefits is available on my Department's website <http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/PSSA-2018-2020-Benefit-Tables.pdf>

Pay increases under the Lansdowne Road Agreement were as follows:

2016

- 1st January annualised salaries up to €24,000 are increased by 2.5%.
- 1st January annualised salaries from €24,001 up to €31,000 are increased by 1%.

2017

- 1st September annualised salaries up to €65,000 are increased by €1,000.

The impact of these benefits can be found at the following link:

<http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-pay-proposals-for-public-servants.docx>

It should be noted that in response to the anomaly created by the Labour Court recommendation on Garda pay, the Government approved an increase in annualised salaries of €1,000 for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st August 2017 inclusive for:

- those on annualised salaries up to €65,000;
- who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement; and
- who do not stand to benefit from the Labour Court Recommendations (CD/16/321 & CD/16/322) issued in respect of the Garda Associations.

This effectively brought forward the 1st September 2017 increase to 1st April 2017 for those public servants covered.

Garda Stations

82. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question number 98 of 4 October 2017, what companies are subletting a space or fixing to a garda telecom mast and their location by Garda station, in tabular form. [42925/17]

84. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to parliamentary question number 98 of 4 October 2017, the location in which the income from rental space on telecoms masts is lodged to; if An Garda Síochána keeps the income; if he is satisfied that the collection of income is revenue compliant; if the OPW or An Garda Síochána is engaged in long term rental contracts with companies for rental space on telecoms masts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43008/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 84 together.

Questions - Written Answers

The Commissioners of Public Works (OPW) have issued licences to install telecommunications equipment on masts at Garda Stations to the following companies, all of which are licensed by ComReg to provide services in Ireland.

- Three Ireland (Hutchison) Ltd.
- Three Ireland Services (Hutchison) Ltd. (formerly O2 Ireland Ltd)
- Vodafone Ireland Ltd.
- Meteor Mobile Communications Ltd. (now known as Eir)
- Tetra Ireland Ltd

These licences are for the provision of digital radio services to An Garda Síochána and other emergency services and as a result of this a licence fee is not payable.

The enclosed table shows the number of companies licensed at each location. All licences are granted by OPW and are generally for a 10-year term. All licence fees are payable to OPW and are subject to VAT. The fees are initially lodged to OPW and subsequently 15% plus VAT of the annual licence fees was paid to OPW's agent for managing the sites on OPW's behalf and 30% is transferred to the Department of Justice & Equality.

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Carlow	Carlow Garda Station	3
Carlow	Tullow Garda Station	2
Cavan	Arva Garda Station	1
Cavan	Bawnboy Garda Station	1
Cavan	Blacklion Garda Station	4
Cavan	Cavan Garda Station	4
Cavan	Cootehill Garda Station	1
Cavan	Mullagh Garda Station	1
Cavan	Shercock Garda Station	1
Cavan	Swanlinbar Garda Station	2
Clare	Ballyvaughan Garda Station	1
Clare	Ennis Garda Station	2
Clare	Kildysart Garda Station	1
Clare	Killaloe Garda Station	4
Clare	Newmarket-on-Fergus Garda Station	1
Clare	Shannon Garda Station	3
Clare	Sixmilebridge Garda Station	2

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Cork	Anglesea Street Garda Station	1
Cork	Ballycotton Garda Station	1
Cork	Ballydesmond Garda Station	2
Cork	Ballynoe Garda Station	1
Cork	Bandon Garda Station	3
Cork	Bishopstown Garda Station	2
Cork	Buttevant Garda Station	3
Cork	Carrigaline Garda Station	1
Cork	Castletownbere Garda Station	1

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Cork	Castletownshend Garda Station	1
Cork	Charleville Garda Station	2
Cork	Clonakilty Garda Station	4
Cork	Donoughmore Garda Station	2
Cork	Durrus Garda Station	1
Cork	Gurranabraher Garda Station	4
Cork	Kealkill Garda Station	1
Cork	Kinsale Garda Station	3
Cork	Liscarroll Garda Station	1
Cork	Middleton Garda Station	3
Cork	Mitchelstown Garda Station	3
Cork	Rathduff Garda Station	1
Cork	Roscarberry Garda Station	3
Cork	Schull Garda Station	1
Cork	Skibbereen Garda Station	3
Cork	Youghal Garda Station	2
Donegal	Buncrana Garda Station	1
Donegal	Carrick Garda Station	1
Donegal	Dunfanaghy Garda Station	1
Donegal	Falcarragh Garda Station	1
Donegal	Glenties Garda Station	2
Donegal	Letterkenny Garda Station	2
Donegal	Lifford Garda Station	1
Donegal	Milford Garda Station (Donegal)	3
Donegal	Moville Garda Station	2

table cont.

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Dublin	Ballyfermot Garda Station	3
Dublin	Blackrock Garda Station (Dublin)	1
Dublin	Blanchardstown Garda Station	4
Dublin	Bridewell Garda Station	3
Dublin	Cabinteely Garda Station	4
Dublin	Cabra Garda Station	3
Dublin	Clondalkin Garda Station	1
Dublin	Clontarf Garda Station	2
Dublin	Coolock Garda Station	4
Dublin	Crumlin Garda Station	3
Dublin	Dalkey Garda Station	1
Dublin	Donnybrook Garda Station	1
Dublin	Dun Laoghaire Garda Station	2
Dublin	Fitzgibbon St Garda Station	4
Dublin	Garristown Garda Station	1
Dublin	Howth Garda Station	4
Dublin	Irishtown Garda Station	1
Dublin	Kill o the Grange Garda Station	1
Dublin	Kilmainham Garda Station	3
Dublin	Lucan Garda Station	4

Questions - Written Answers

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Dublin	Malahide Garda Station	2
Dublin	Mountjoy Garda Station	4
Dublin	Pearse Street Garda Station	2
Dublin	Phoenix Park - GHQ	3
Dublin	Raheny Garda Station	4
Dublin	Rathfarnham Garda Station	3
Dublin	Rathmines Garda Station	4
Dublin	Ronanstown Garda Station	2
Dublin	Saggart Hill Garda Radio Mast	1
Dublin	Santry Garda Station	2
Dublin	Shankill Garda Station	4
Dublin	Stepaside Garda Station	3

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Dublin	Store St Garda Station	1
Dublin	Sundrive Road Garda Station	1
Dublin	Swords Garda Station	2
Dublin	Tallaght Garda Station	3
Dublin	Terenure Garda Station	2
Dublin	Whitehall Garda Station	2
Galway	Athenry Garda Station	1
Galway	Ballinasloe Garda Station	1
Galway	Eyrecourt Garda Station	1
Galway	Galway Mill St. Garda Station	1
Galway	Glenamaddy Garda Station	1
Galway	Gort Garda Station	2
Galway	Inverin Garda Station	1
Galway	Killimor Garda Station	3
Galway	Kilronan Garda Station	2
Galway	Loughrea Garda Station	4
Galway	Maam Garda Station	1
Galway	Oranmore Garda Station	1
Galway	Oughterard Garda Station	2
Galway	Salthill Garda Station	2
Galway	Woodford Garda Station	2
Kerry	Ballinskelligh Garda Station	1
Kerry	Ballybunion Garda Station	1
Kerry	Ballyheigue Garda Station	3
Kerry	Caherciveen Garda Station	1
Kerry	Camp Garda Station	1
Kerry	Castleisland Garda Station	3
Kerry	Dingle Garda Station	1
Kerry	Glenbeigh Garda Station	2
Kerry	Kenmare Garda Station	1
Kerry	Kilgarvan Garda Station	3
Kerry	Killarney Garda Station	2
Kerry	Killorglin Garda Station	3
Kerry	Knocknagoshel Garda Station	1
Kerry	Listowel Garda Station	2

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Kerry	Rathmore Garda Station	3
Kerry	Sneem Garda Station	2
Kerry	Tarbert Garda Station	1
Kerry	Tralee Garda Station	2
Kerry	Waterville Garda Station	3

table cont.

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Kildare	Kilcock Garda Station	1
Kildare	Kildare Garda Station	2
Kildare	Kill Garda Station	1
Kildare	Leixlip Garda Station	1
Kildare	Monasterevin Garda Station	4
Kildare	Naas Garda Station	3
Kilkenny	Ballyhale Garda Station	3
Kilkenny	Callan Garda Station	1
Kilkenny	Castlecomer Garda Station	2
Kilkenny	Freshford Garda Station	1
Kilkenny	Goresbridge Garda Station	1
Kilkenny	Thomastown Garda Station	1
Laois	Portarlinton Garda Station	1
Laois	Portlaoise Garda Station	2
Laois	Stradbally Garda Station (Laois)	1
Leitrim	Carrick-On-Shannon Garda Station	1
Leitrim	Kinlough Garda Station	1
Leitrim	Manorhamilton Garda Station	3
Leitrim	Mohill Garda Station	1
Limerick	Abbeyfeale Garda Station	3
Limerick	Bruff Garda Station	2
Limerick	Croom Garda Station	2
Limerick	Drumcollogher Garda Station	3
Limerick	Foynes Garda Station	3
Limerick	Kilmallock Garda Station	2
Limerick	Murroe Garda Station	1
Limerick	Pallaskenry Garda Station	1
Limerick	Rathkeale Garda Station	3
Limerick	Roxboro Garda Station	1
Longford	Granard Garda Station	3
Louth	Carlingford Garda Station	4
Louth	Castlebellingham Garda Station	1
Louth	Clogherhead Garda Station	2
Louth	Dundalk Garda Station	1
Louth	Dunleer Garda Station	1
Louth	Hackballscross Garda Station	1
Louth	Omeath Garda Station	3
Mayo	Ballycastle Garda Station	2
Mayo	Ballycroy Garda Station	1
Mayo	Glenisland Garda Station	1

Questions - Written Answers

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Mayo	Swinford Garda Station	2
County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Meath	Dunboyne Garda Station	4
Meath	Dunshaughlin Garda Station	2
Meath	Kells Garda Station	4
Meath	Slane Garda Station	3
Meath	Summerhill Garda Station	4
Meath	Trim Garda Station	1
Monaghan	Carrickmacross Garda Station	1
Monaghan	Castleblayney Garda Station	3
Monaghan	Clones Garda Station	3
Monaghan	Clontibret Garda Station	2
Monaghan	Emyvale Garda Station	2
Monaghan	Monaghan Garda Station	4
Monaghan	Rockorry Garda Station	1
Offaly	Clonbullogue Garda Station	1
Offaly	Moneygall	1
Roscommmon	Boyle Garda Station	4
Roscommmon	Castlerea Garda Station	1
Roscommmon	Roscommon Garda Station	2
Sligo	Ballymote Garda Station	1
Sligo	Collooney Garda Station	2
Sligo	Easkey Garda Station	3
Sligo	Gurteen Garda Station	1
Sligo	Riverstown Garda Station	2
Sligo	Sligo Garda Station	1
Tipperary	Ardfinnan Garda Station	1
Tipperary	Ballingarry South Garda Station	2
Tipperary	Cahir Garda Station	1
Tipperary	Cashel Garda Station	1
Tipperary	Holycross Garda Station	3
Tipperary	Killenaule Garda Station	1
Tipperary	Nenagh Garda Station	2
Tipperary	Templemore Garda College	3
Tipperary	Thurles Garda Station	3
Tipperary	Tipperary Garda Station	2
Waterford	Dungarvan Garda Station	1
Waterford	Dunmore East Garda Station	1
Waterford	Kilmackthomas Garda Station	1
Waterford	Lismore Garda Station	1
Waterford	Tramore Garda Station	2
Waterford	Waterford Garda Station	3
Westmeath	Killucan Garda Station	1
Westmeath	Mullingar Garda Station	2
Westmeath	Multyfarnham Garda Station	1
Wexford	Bunclody Garda Station	2
Wexford	Campile Garda Station	1
Wexford	Clonroche Garda Station	1

County	Site Name	Number of Operators Licenced
Wexford	Courtown Garda Station	2
Wexford	Duncannon Garda Station	4
Wexford	Enniscorthy Garda Station	1
Wexford	Gorey Garda Station	2
Wexford	Kilmore Quay Garda Station	4
Wexford	Rosslare Harbour Garda Station	1
Wexford	Wexford Garda Station	1
Wicklow	Arklow Garda Station	2
Wicklow	Aughrim Garda Station	1
Wicklow	Avoca Garda Station	1
Wicklow	Blessington Garda Station	3
Wicklow	Dunlavin Garda Station	1
Wicklow	Enniskerry Garda Station	2
Wicklow	Greystones Garda Station	1
Wicklow	Roundwood Garda Station	1
Wicklow	Tinahely Garda Station	3

Revised Estimates Publication

83. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No.76 of 21 September 2017, when he expects to present a new Revised Estimates Volume for 2017 to Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43004/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following the decision in relation to re-organisation of Government Departments, the composition of a number of Departments has changed particularly with the establishment of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The Estimates for 2017, published in the Revised Estimates Volume 2017, were voted on by Dáil Éireann in May 2017. Further Revised Estimates are to be presented to Dáil Éireann that will reflect the impact on Departmental allocations of the transfer of functions.

Work in relation to finalising the exact allocations to be transferred between Departments has just been finalised. My Department is making the necessary arrangements required in advance of presenting the Estimates to the Dáil in due course.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 82.

Garda Station Refurbishment

85. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the OPW's discussions on the refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42200/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works continues to engage in discussions with the landlord regarding the extent of necessary works to be carried out on the property.

Pharmaceutical Sector

86. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when pharmacists and other self-employed persons will have their pay restored in view of the fact that FEMPI has been unwound in many sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42233/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under Section 9 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (as amended), the power to vary fees paid to pharmacists and other health professionals is the responsibility in the first instance of my colleague the Minister for Health.

Lobbying Data

87. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42296/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since March 2016, there have been seven Representations received from a number of organisations regarding the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, as listed below:

- Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland
- Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland
- Responsible Retailing of Alcohol in Ireland (RRAI) - three REPS received
- Galway Health Cities Alcohol Forum
- IBEC

This correspondence was dealt with at official level.

My Special Adviser has also received representations on this issue.

I have not attended any meetings regarding the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. I am informed that my predecessor did not attend any such meetings in the timeframe indicated.

Meetings with Designated Public Officials are required to be registered on the Register of Lobbying and are publicly available at:

<https://www.lobbying.ie/>

Garda Stations

88. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the location of the site for the new Garda headquarters (details supplied) in County Sligo; if it has been procured; the status of the project; the timeframe for planning, construction and completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42318/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works continues to progress the procurement of a suitable

site for the new Garda station. As the negotiations are not yet complete the location of the site cannot be disclosed at this stage.

The construction of this Garda station is to be undertaken as part of a larger PPP bundle.

Arts Funding

89. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the discussions and meetings he has had with the local authority in Cork city regarding extra funding for the event centre; and if other Ministers have discussed it with him. [42371/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Issues related to the Cork Event Centre are a matter for the Minister of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in the first instance. I have not had discussions or meetings with Cork City Council in relation to the project.

Cúrsaí Gaeilge

90. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna freagra a thabhairt ar an gceist faoin gcostas an-mhór is gá d'ábhair múinteoirí a íoc chun freastal ar chúrsaí Gaeltachta (sonraí tugtha); agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42582/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Glacadh an cinneadh chun deireadh a chur le deontais chun tréimhse a chaitheamh sa Ghaeltacht le linn na géarchéime eacnamaíochta nuair a bhí cinntí an-deacra le déanamh, ar an drochuair, chun cúrsaí airgeadais an náisiúin a chobhsú. Tugadh tosaíocht do chosaint acmhainní le haghaidh seirbhísí tosaigh oideachais oiread agus ab fhéidir, agus is ábhar dúshlánach é seo fós agus líon na bpáistí in aois scoile ag méadú de shíor. Níl an maoiniú a theastaíonn leis an tacaíocht seo a thabhairt ar ais arís ag mo Roinn.

Ba cheart a thabhairt ar aird, gur féidir le mic léinn a fhaigheann deontas mac léinn lena n-áirítear 100% de dheontas táillí, nó mic léinn a cháileodh le haghaidh deontas iomlán táillí murach na Scéimeanna Táillí Saor in Aisce, iarratas a chur isteach le haghaidh maoinithe i dtreo costas taistil agus cóiríochta faoin ngné turais allamuigh de dheontas táillí, faoi réir ghnáth-thearmaí agus ghnáthchoinníollacha na scéime deontais mac léinn.

Taobh amuigh de seo, i gcás imthosca a bhaineann le riachtanais faoi leith, féadfaidh mic léinn iarratas a chur isteach le haghaidh tacaíochta faoin gCiste um Chúnadh do Mhic Léinn. Is féidir teacht ar bhreis faisnéise maidir leis an gciste seo ón Oifigeach Rochtana san institiúid tríú leibhéal a bhfuiltear ag freastal uirthi.

Education Grants

91. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial supports available to parents who wish to send their children to Gaeltacht areas (details supplied) over the summer months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42589/17]

98. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the hardship that the withdrawal of Government subsidies towards mandatory Gaeltacht courses for

student primary teachers has caused; if these subsidies will be reinstated in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42483/17]

102. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reinstate or introduce a grant aid payment to families that wish to send their children to Gaeltacht areas (details supplied) in 2018 and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42590/17]

108. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore the subsidy granted to all B.Ed and professional masters of education students, who are required by the teaching council to undergo two mandatory two-week Gaeltacht courses. [42669/17]

109. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the grant for primary school student teachers for their courses in the Gaeltacht as part of their training will be restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42691/17]

111. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will restore subsidies to student primary school teachers in respect of Gaeltacht courses undertaken by them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42697/17]

130. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if budget 2018 will reinstate the subsidies for the two mandatory Gaeltacht courses (details supplied) which student primary teachers attend. [42873/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91, 98, 102, 108, 109, 111 and 130 together.

The decision to stop the Gaeltacht placement grants was taken during the economic crisis when, unfortunately, very difficult decisions had to be made to stabilise the nation's finances. Priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible, which remains particularly challenging with rising numbers of school-going children. My Department does not have the funding available to restore this support.

It should be noted that, to assist with the costs of the Gaeltacht placement, students who are in receipt of a student grant which includes a 100% fee grant, or who would have qualified for a full fee grant but for the Free Fees Schemes, can apply for funding towards travel and accommodation costs under the field trip element of a fee grant, subject to the normal terms and conditions of the student grant scheme. Apart from this, in circumstances of particular need, students may apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. Information in relation to this fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

92. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that, on average, primary school classes here have four to five more pupils than those throughout the EU; if provision will be made in budget 2018 to resume work on reducing class sizes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42472/17]

147. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that the average class size here is now the fifth highest in the OECD and the highest in the eurozone. [42907/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 and 147 together.

Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by 1 point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year and it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

Budget 2017 set out the resources available for schools in the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represented the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade.

The 2017/18 school year brings a significant increase of over 5,000 in teacher numbers in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

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.

Our average class size at primary level is only slightly above the EU average in relation to the pupil teacher ratio.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

However, I recognise that there are needs across the system which have to be balanced in the decisions made in each Budget.

School Staff

93. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the loss of 5,000 middle management posts in primary education; his plans to expedite the restoration of these posts by ensuring that provision is made in budget 2018 to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42473/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2017 provided for a new package of support for school leadership, including middle management posts for primary and post primary schools.

My department recently issued circular 0063/2017 Leadership and Management in Primary schools which sets out a framework for posts in recognised primary schools.

The commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model means that the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts has been lifted and schools can now fill middle management posts in line with circular 0063/2017. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

School Funding

94. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact

that school grants were cut by 15% in the recession and that fundraising initiatives have to be taken on by schools to cover basic needs; if funding will be increased in budget 2018 to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42474/17]

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

The Action Plan for Education aimed at making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026 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 under way 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. A similar type approach in relation to improvements in grant funding was applied, as appropriate, at post-primary level.

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

DEIS Expenditure

95. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to maintain the resourcing of DEIS schools, restore support services and attain a 15:1 maximum class size in DEIS band 1 junior classes by making suitable provision in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42475/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools is the main policy initiative of my Department to address educational disadvantage which was updated earlier this year with the publication of DEIS Plan 2017.

I wish to point out that the resourcing of DEIS schools has and will continue to be maintained. In fact, for the first time in ten years I extended the DEIS programme of supports to 79 new schools as well as providing additional resources to 30 existing DEIS schools, following a new assessment of all schools earlier this year. Details of the full range of supports available to DEIS schools can be found on my Department's website at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Supporting-Information/Supports-to-DEIS-Schools.html>

As the deputy may be aware, there is a specific action in DEIS Plan 2017 in relation to class size and I have committed to an evaluation of the optimum level of teaching resources to help inform future policy in this area. This work will be taken forward as part of the implementation of DEIS Plan 2107, which is currently under way. In the meantime, Urban Band 1 DEIS primary schools continue to benefit from a reduced class size of 20:1 in junior classes and 24:1 in senior classes.

School Staff

96. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore the supply panels of primary school teachers by making suitable provision in budget 2018; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [42476/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A value for money review of the Supply Teacher Scheme was published in July 2006. The review found that only approx. 60% of supply teachers' time was used to cover sick leave absences. This reflects the unpredictable nature of sick leave absences.

While there are benefits for schools in having these teachers it is considered more cost effective to use the normal substitution arrangements that apply to all other schools to cover sick leave absences instead of having a cohort of full-time teachers "on call" all the time in these schools to cover sick leave absences that may or may not arise.

Public Sector Pay

97. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the impact that FEMPI has had on the livelihood and morale of school teachers; his plans to restore pay equality as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42477/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. A previous Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. This decision also required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale, which in the case of teachers had the effect of reducing their starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreements have, to date, restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and apprenticeships.

As a result of these changes and taking into account the proposed pay measures under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the starting salary of a new teacher from 1 January 2018 will be €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. If full equalisation was achieved the starting salary for a post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 would be €43,879 and for a primary teacher would be €41,511.

Further to this, newly recruited teachers benefit from the terms of the Ward Circular which reduced the qualifying period from a CID and the removal of the career break and secondment categories of objective grounds which had previously prevented some teachers from gaining CIDs. In addition to earlier permanency, other measures of benefit to newly recruited teachers included a revised sequence for the filling of posts to enable fixed-term and part time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more quickly and easier than before.

It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost (including new entrants recruited this September) would be in the order of €130 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind, for example equality between public servant and people who work elsewhere or don't work at all. It would not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectoral issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Accordingly, the recently concluded draft Public Service Agreement 2018-2020 includes a provision in relation to new entrants which states that an examination of the remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades covered by parties to the Agreement will be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

Question No. 98 answered with Question No. 91.

School Staff

99. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the request for a fifth year teacher and adequate resourcing and supports by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42555/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, St. Thomas Special School is a school which caters for boys who are members of the Traveller community. This school is due to be phased out in line with agreed national education policy, developed and agreed with Traveller representative groups which provides for the education of Traveller children in the mainstream school system.

In the meantime, my Department is maintaining the same level of resources in the school as heretofore (a Principal, 4 teaching posts and two Special Needs Assistants for the current enrolment of 26 pupils).

The school has made an application to my Department for an expansion of its services to Traveller pupils. Officials of my Department are currently engaging with the school patron and management to see how the needs of the pupils currently in the school can best be met.

Schools Building Projects

100. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the extension to a school (details supplied). [42574/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

The preparatory work required to initiate the architectural planning process for the project has commenced and my Department is continuing to liaise with the school in this regard.

Schools Refurbishment

101. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a school (details supplied); his further plans to provide funding for renovations at same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42584/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has visited the school to which he refers and met with the school principal. An area of priority that the school wish to see addressed relates to insulation works. In this regard, the principal has undertaken to secure cost estimates for these works and revert to my Department. I understand that this process is in train.

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 91.

Legislative Programme

103. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016, will return to Dáil Éireann for Report Stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42593/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 was published on 6th July 2016 and passed Committee Stage on 28th June 2017.

My officials are currently engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to a number of amendments proposed for Report Stage of the Bill. It is my intention to progress this Bill to Report Stage once these amendments have been finalised.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

104. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to resolve the reduction in special education teaching at a school (details supplied). [42626/17]

105. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional teaching hours for pupils at a school (detailed supplied) will be allocated. [42627/17]

124. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for no extra allocation of special education teaching hours for a school (details supplied). [42800/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104, 105 and 124 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that under the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs

support which includes a baseline allocation for the school and an allocation based on the school's profile.

Details of the manner in which the allocations have been provided to schools are set out in my Departments Circulars 0013 and 0014 2017

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the school referred to in his question received an allocation of 68.90 hours special education teaching support, based on its school profile and an enrolment of 216 pupils at the time that the school profile developed. This is a substantial allocation of hours for a school of this size.

Whereas the profiled allocation had indicated a need of 67.50 hours for this school, based on its school profile and size, and relative to the profiled needs of all other schools, the school was allocated 68.90 hours, which was equivalent to the allocation the school received in 2016/17.

There has therefore been no reduction to the allocation of special educational needs teaching support for this school.

It is acknowledged and accepted that schools will have some additional pupils with special educational needs enrolling to their school subsequent to the profiles having been developed.

However, for the most part these will be balanced by the fact that some students who had additional teaching needs in the previous year will have left the school. The baseline is also designed to ensure that schools have some capacity to provide additional support to pupils. This school also has some additional capacity in the retained element of its allocation which is above that indicated by the school profile.

Under the new allocation model schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This will reduce the administrative burden on schools as schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

Schools will therefore no longer have to make applications, for newly enrolled pupils for whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

The new allocations to schools include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

It should be noted that this is a brand new model of allocation and is not comparable to the previous model which had been in place.

By using a broad range of attainment and socio-economic criteria, it is expected that generally, a school's profile will remain relatively constant from year to year. Each year, some students with additional teaching needs will leave and others will enrol, broadly balancing the school profile. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

A process has also been put in place to address circumstances where the school profile significantly changed following the allocation process due to the fact that the school had rapidly developing status where the net enrolment numbers significantly increased.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in DES Circular 17/2017 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) and DES 10,11,12/2017 (Post Primary School Staffing Schedule).

Schools who have qualified for additional mainstream developing school posts on the basis of developing growth in accordance with these criteria will also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

My Department has issued guidelines for schools to support them in the management of their resources. These guidelines are available on my Department's website.

Schools are encouraged to take guidelines on board in the planning process for the 2017/18 school year. In order to determine the levels of need within each school, it will be important for schools to have properly identified students with additional learning needs and have developed plans for each student indicating how the supports available will be used.

In this context, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will be available to support schools where these plans have been developed and implemented but the school considers that further support may be required. This support may involve Continuing Professional Development or further training for school staff, advice in relation to the support plan that is in place, and possibly a review process once schools can clearly demonstrate that exceptional circumstances have arisen in the school.

The NCSE will shortly be advising how schools can seek a review of the utilisation of their allocations in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

Schools Building Projects

106. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be allocated for parking facilities at a school (details supplied). [42628/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving correspondence from the school to which he refers relating to the facilities in question.

School Staff

107. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reconsider the new provision limiting secondments for the purpose of serving as directors for education support centres. [42633/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department arranges for the secondment of teachers from their teaching posts for the purpose of developing and providing CPD for teachers and for appointment as Directors of Education Support Centres (ESC's).

By their nature, secondments are not permanent appointments and are renewed each year

subject to ongoing need and policy requirements.

Secondment arrangements provide flexibility and ensure that the in-service needs of teachers and other support priorities of the school system can be met within the resources available. Having teachers with relevant and recent teaching experience and expertise is a key requirement for the role. It is a condition therefore that the maximum length of time that a teacher may be on secondment is five years, following which they return to their teaching roles in their schools. In this way, their expertise and knowledge is not lost to the system. Each ESC has a management committee and staff which ensures continuity at a local level.

Section 37 of the Education Act 1998 provides the legislative basis for the establishment and regulation of Education Centres. Section 37(6) of the Act makes provision to make regulations relating to a number of matters in ESC's such as the appointment of management committees, funding, staffing, provision of information to the DES & other operational matters.

Regulations for the appointment of Directors to Education Centres have now been introduced under Section 37 (6). These regulations, which have been flagged for some time, are effective from 1 September 2017.

I am satisfied that these Regulations will lead to more robust procedures in appointing Directors which in turn will lead to more efficient and effective management of Education Centres.

Question Nos. 108 and 109 answered with Question No. 91.

Schools Building Projects

110. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received a report (details supplied); if he will arrange a meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42695/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to confirm that my Department has received correspondence from the group referred to by the Deputy which includes a report as well as a request to meet with the group. A reply will issue shortly to the group in relation to this correspondence.

As the Deputy may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such 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 within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

With regard to demand for particular models of school provision, it should be noted that the patronage process for new schools is a separate process which has been in place since 2011. This process is run after it has been decided that a new school is required. Parental preferences are central to this process and prospective patrons are required to provide evidence of demand for their particular school model and medium of instruction. Therefore, where, based on demographics, it might be indicated that a new school is required, it cannot be guaranteed that this would be a school under a particular type of patronage as this will be dependent to a large degree on parental preferences in the area at the time of a patronage process.

As with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for these school planning areas is being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit data and updated enrolment data. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 91.

Departmental Properties

112. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school buildings in the ownership of his Department; the number of those that are vacant, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42698/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The only vacant primary school building in my ownership is a former school building in Trim, Co. Meath for which a building project is planned.

Schools Building Projects Status

113. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for completion of a sports hall for a school (details supplied) in order for the school to comply with the junior cycle wellbeing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42714/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme, (2019-2021).

My Department has carried out a site visit at the school in the context of the preparatory work required to advance the project, which will also include determining a schedule of accommodation for the project. My Department will continue to liaise directly with the school authorities regarding the project.

School Staff

114. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money saved on an annual basis in each of the past three years from substitutable days not being covered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42719/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled and will be forwarded to her.

National Educational Psychological Service Data

115. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of educational psychologist posts in place in May 2016, January 2017 and September 2017; and the progress in the recruitment of educational psychologists. [42725/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits that we will invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychological Service to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children and teenagers and to offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents. The Programme commits to bring the total number of NEPS psychologists to 238. Delivery on this commitment is underway in 2017 with an additional eleven NEPS psychologists recruited or in the process of being recruited currently. Additionally my Department, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) has from established regional recruitment panels, been engaged throughout the year in securing recruits to fill vacancies in the NEPS psychologist posts due to ongoing retirement, resignations, etc.

For the Deputy's information there follows detail of the NEPS psychologist staffing numbers for May 2016, January 2017 and September 2017 as well as recruitment since and in prospect in this regard.

Detail of NEPS Staffing Numbers - by head count and whole-time equivalent (w.t.e)

Staffing	Head-Count	w.t.e.
May 2016	175	163.8
January 2017	171	161.2
September 2017	182	171.7
- by End November 2017 (^)	6	6.0
- Confirmed but no Start Date (#)	4	4.0
- Starting in 2018 (&)	2	2.0
- With PAS (*)	1	1.0
	195	184.7

Notes

(^) Recruits have agreed start dates.

(#) The public appointments service has recently processed these recruits and referred them on to the Department's HR Unit for contract negotiations and formal offer. It is expected that these recruits start will be before year's end.

(&) Two recruits have delayed start date due to maternity leave

(*) PAS are currently polling the recruitment panels for a recruit

116. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the mandatory age up to which a child must remain at school. [42729/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 parents are responsible for ensuring that their child receives an education. Article 42 of the Constitution acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and provides for parents to provide an education for their child in their homes if they so wish.

The Education (Welfare) Act provides that the minimum school leaving age is 16 years, or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later.

The Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (EWS) is responsible for ensuring that this requirement is met.

Education and Training Boards Staff

117. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a copy of the advertisements and job specifications for each education and training board, ETB, chief executive's role that has been filled since 2013. [42736/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since 2013 competitions to fill vacancies for the post of Chief Executive in the following Education and Training Boards Chief Executive have been conducted by the Public Appointments Service: Longford and Westmeath, Laois and Offaly, Donegal and Waterford and Wexford.

My Department is gathering the relevant documentation and will forward same to the Deputy shortly.

Education and Training Boards Data

118. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the official head offices of all education and training boards, ETBs, here; and the assigned ETB centre of each chief executive for the purposes of claiming expenses. [42737/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The table outlines the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and their head offices:

ETBs	Head Office
Cavan Monaghan	Monaghan
City of Dublin	Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
Cork	Cork
Donegal	Letterkenny, Co Donegal
Dublin Dun Laoghaire	Tallaght, Dublin 24
Galway Roscommon	Athenry, Co Galway
Kerry	Tralee, Co Kerry
Kildare Wicklow	Naas, Co Kildare
Kilkenny Carlow	Carlow
Laois Offaly	Portlaoise, Co Laois
Limerick Clare	Doradoyle Rd, Co Limerick
Longford Westmeath	Mullingar, Co Westmeath

ETBs	Head Office
Louth Meath	Drogheda, Co Louth (currently operating from Navan and Dundalk)
Mayo Sligo Leitrim	Castlebar, Co Mayo
Tipperary	Nenagh, Tipperary
Waterford Wexford	Ardcavan, Wexford

A number of the ETBs have one or more sub-offices. Travel expenses for ETB staff are paid in accordance with public sector norms and policies. My Department will collate the relevant information in respect of Chief Executives as requested by the Deputy.

School Staff Appeals Mechanism

119. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an appeal submitted by a primary school (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42738/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its April 2017 meeting under the small school criterion. The appeal was provisionally approved by the Appeals Board pending confirmation of the actual enrolments on the 30th September 2017. However it now appears that the actual pupil numbers on that date have not come in as projected by the school and therefore this post will be suppressed on 27th October 2017.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Ministerial Functions

120. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42778/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Two Ministers of State were appointed at my Department, Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. as Minister of State with responsibility for Higher Education and John Halligan T.D. as Minister of State with responsibility for Training, Skills, Innovation and Research and Development.

There are two Delegation of Functions Orders in place. These Orders were made on the 18th July 2017 and are available at www.irishstatutebook.ie website.

Prior to 14th June 2017 my Department did not have a Minister of State with responsibility

for Higher Education and in that regard the delegated functions to Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. as Minister of State with responsibility for Higher Education are new. While Minister of State Halligan's responsibilities remain the same, the title of his portfolio has changed to Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation and Research.

School Transport Eligibility

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an eligible concessionary school ticket or transport can be facilitated for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42791/17]

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 eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest Post Primary School/Education Centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question is not attending her nearest post primary school and is therefore not eligible for school transport.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport 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.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that there are seats available on an existing service and the family should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office if they wish to avail of transport on a concessionary basis.

The terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Education Policy

122. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the benefits and-or weaknesses of setting homework for children in primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42798/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I believe that homework, when assigned in accordance with the learning needs of students, has potential to benefit their learning. It can help to consolidate work already covered during class time and help pupils to prepare for forthcoming class work. It can also promote independent learning. In addition, it plays an important role in promoting home school links. The national and international research literature indicates that informal at-home involvement such as parents helping with homework and discussing school with their children can contribute to children's achievement.

My Department does not issue any guidelines relating to homework being given in schools. It is a matter for each school, at local level, to arrive at its own homework policy. Parents can discuss any matters relating to homework directly with their child's class teacher or with the principal of the school.

Schools Building Projects

123. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has identified suitable sites for the construction of a new building for a school (details supplied). [42799/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the building project for the school in question is included in my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with officials in the relevant local authority in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable site for the school.

A number of potential sites were identified by the local authority and were technically assessed. From these, a shortlist of site options has been selected and these are currently subject to more detailed consideration.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time but I can assure the Deputy that the school patron will be informed of the proposed location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 104.

Summer Works Scheme Administration

125. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the guidelines for the summer works scheme, SWS, will remain the same for the 2017-2018 year in line with the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 grant guidelines, specifically noting if the applicants must have submitted an application for the 2013-2014 round of SWS grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42801/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the criteria governing the call for proposals under the Summer Works Scheme were outlined in the Circular which accompanied the announcement of the Scheme in November 2015. A copy of the Circular (0055/2015), is available on my Department's website, www.education.ie. These criteria continue to apply.

The current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is being applied on a multi-annual basis. The Deputy will also be aware that nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 to 6 are published on my Department's website www.education.ie. The assessment of applications in the remaining Categories 7-10 is reliant on the availability of funding.

The announcement of a further Summer Works Scheme in 2018 will be a matter for consideration at that time.

Schools Administration

126. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to support schools that wish to dispose of unwanted chemicals or dangerous materials from school labs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42810/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the first instance school authorities should consult the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the environmental section of their local authority for guidance on how to dispose of unwanted chemicals or dangerous materials before proceeding to engage a specialist licenced firm to assist with the disposal of the waste.

If the costs associated with the disposal of unwanted materials is substantial the school authority may submit an application for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme. Application forms are available on my Department's website.

National Educational Psychological Service Data

127. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children waiting for an educational assessment in primary and secondary schools, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42824/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments (SCPA). Every child therefore has access to educational psychological assessment services either through the NEPS or SCPA psychologist.

NEPS does not maintain waiting lists but, in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

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

I would advise if there are concerns in relation to the educational development of any student that these should be raised, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he/she is attending, with a view to the Principal discussing the situation with the assigned NEPS psy-

chologist or local NEPS office.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

128. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of employing extra special needs assistants for every ten employed. [42837/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The initial cost of employing 10 additional Special Needs Assistants for one year would be approximately €323,000. This is inclusive of the cost of employers PRSI.

Special need assistants are paid on an incremental salary scale and accordingly the cost of their employment would increase in subsequent years.

An additional 975 SNA posts have been made available for allocation to schools from September 2017 which is a 7.5% increase to meet the demands for the new school year. A total of 13,990 SNA posts are now available at a gross annual cost of €458 million. This is more SNAs than we have ever had previously and will ensure that all children who qualify for SNA support can continue to receive access to such support. In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by over 32% since 2011, when 10,575 posts were available.

As the Deputy may be aware, the NCSE are currently undertaking a Comprehensive Assessment of the SNA Scheme. In this context, I have requested the NCSE to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing a better model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs. This Working Group has commenced its work and it will run in tandem with the completion of the overall Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme.

It is intended that the reports of the Working Group and of the Review will be completed in Spring 2018.

Broadband Service Provision

129. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will have access to high-speed broadband as identified as one of the ten key indicators in the digital strategy for schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42863/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for recognised primary and post primary schools. All post-primary schools and some special schools are now included in the 100Mbps programme.

Under the current programme the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, in line with contractual and budgetary requirements. A recent drawdown from the Framework of Providers of Broadband Services saw some 1,100 primary schools awarded download speeds of 30Mbps or greater (the baseline download speed required under the National Broadband Plan). Some 900 of those schools have now been connected with the balance to be in place by the end of 2017.

Significant improvement has been made in recent years with the number of primary schools on broadband speeds of greater than 30mbps having increased from less than 100 in 2012 to over 1000 by the end of 2017. In Wicklow in 2012, no primary school had access to

broadband speeds of 30mbs or greater, now some 30 primary schools in Wicklow have access to broadband speeds of 30mbs or greater.

The policy of this Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with the technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. Broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and local infrastructure, and thus impact on the service that can be provided.

The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and as noted access to high speed broadband is one of the indicators identified in the Digital Strategy Action Plan. An interdepartmental working group has been established to determine how best to address broadband connectivity to primary schools in collaboration with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the context of the National Broadband Plan and the Intervention Strategy, and proposed industry provision.

In the case of the school referred to be the Deputy, the Schools Broadband Service Desk and the current Service Provider have reviewed the service provided, and they advise that the school is on the best broadband solution available at present. The school is included in the National Broadband Plan Intervention area (NBP). As you will be aware, the National Broadband Plan is a government sponsored programme to deliver high speed broadband to homes and businesses across Ireland.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 91.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

131. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to build a primary school for children with autism in the Dublin 15 area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42878/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

- 61% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 13% to attend special schools.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there. This can be due to significant difficulties in areas such as behaviour or sensory needs which have not been ameliorated, even with appropriate intervention, in mainstream. Enrolment in an ASD special class can be considered

for these students where it has been demonstrated that he/she is unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports.

Others students with ASD may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

There are 37 Special Schools in Dublin city and county. Special Schools funded by my Department are intended to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

Special Schools are staffed in accordance with arrangements set out in my Department's Circular 0042/2011, which provides for enhanced pupil teacher ratios for pupils attending Special Schools ranging from 6-1, to 12-1, on the basis of disability categorisation of pupils attending the school.

Many special schools now enrol students from disability categories other than from those provided for by their school designations.

Since 2012 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 628 in 2012 to 1,300 across the country now, of which 1,042 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes. Of these there are 177 classes in Dublin City and County, including 18 Early Intervention Classes for children who are not yet school going age, 123 primary school classes and 36 at post primary level in mainstream schools. 17 primary and 3 post-primary ASD classes are in the area referred to by the Deputy.

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special school and class placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Needs Unit (SNU) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. Typically, a two classroom SNU is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom unit is provided in new post primary schools.

In the case of existing schools, where a school is not in a position to accommodate a special class within its existing accommodation, it is open to the school to submit an application to the Department for capital funding to (i) re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class or (ii) to construct additional accommodation.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that any required additional special school placements will be available for the forthcoming school years.

School Accommodation Provision

132. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision regarding an application for funding for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied) will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42885/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for additional school accommodation.

The application is currently being assessed and my Department expects to be in a position to convey a decision on the application to the school shortly.

School Accommodation Provision

133. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the prefab replacement programme for schools; and the length of time a school can expect to be waiting for inclusion in this programme. [42893/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, it is my intention in accordance with the Programme for Government to replace school pre-fabs with permanent accommodation over the lifetime of my Department's capital programme 2016-2021.

To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum and to determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each school involved. It is intended that this assessment when finalised will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019.

School Costs

134. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the cost of insurance to schools (details supplied) will be examined; and if the possibility of putting in place a national school insurance policy will also be examined. [42894/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Responsibility for procurement of insurance and payment of same rests with Boards of Management and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in respect of schools operated by them. If a particular school has a query in relation to the cost of insurance it should raise this directly with its insurance provider.

Boards of Management and ETBs should take a proactive approach when it comes to sourcing insurance in order to ensure best value is obtained and to ensure compliance with public procurement procedures.

My Department has no plans to put a national school insurance policy in place as suggested by the Deputy. However, the Schools Procurement Unit which has a national remit is available to advise and assist schools in relation to procurement matters.

School Costs

135. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether

it is equitable for small rural and older schools to pay the same insurance premium as large urban schools. [42895/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Responsibility for the payment of insurance rests with Boards of Management and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in respect of schools operated by them.

Funding is provided by my Department in respect of general running costs including insurance. If a particular school has a query in relation to the cost of insurance it should raise this directly with its insurance provider.

Capitation Grants

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the recent drop in capitation payments for schools from €200 to €165 is justified; and the reason for the large gap between the capitation payment received at primary and secondary levels. [42896/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I do recognise the need to improve capitation funding for primary and post-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 aimed at making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026 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 as resources permit.

School Costs

137. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the budget allowance to schools will be increased in view of testimonials which state that parents are having to fund basic essentials such as insurance, electricity and oil. [42897/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to im-

prove capitation funding for primary and post-primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

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. A similar type approach in relation to improvements in grant funding was applied, as appropriate, at post-primary level.

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

Mental Health Services

138. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will carry out a review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, CAMHS, in order to ensure that there is support in place if a child's needs cannot be met in school. [42898/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) which is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE), is a service that provides assessment and treatment for young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Inpatient psychiatric treatment is usually provided in CAMHS for children and adolescents up to the age of 18 with severe psychiatric disorders. Admittance to CAMHS is a short term intervention for a number of weeks or months. CAMHS units also treat day patients, who may attend CAMHS units on a daily basis for a period of time.

The aim of admission of a child/young adult to a CAMHS adolescent inpatient unit is to provide accurate assessment of those with the most severe disorders, implement specific and audited treatment programmes, and to achieve the earliest possible discharge of the young person back to their family and ongoing care of the Community team.

Educational support is provided by my Department to young people while in-patient in a number of CAMHS units, who then return to the school in which they are already enrolled following discharge from CAMHS.

Educational provision at a hospital or medical facility, including CAMHS Units, is a short term intervention designed to provide for some continuity of education during the young person's stay. CAMHS units do not have fulltime enrolments, but have a transient student population who avail of education, subject to their medical fitness to participate in education, during their stay and for periods of time during the day.

Not all young people attending CAMHS are medically fit to avail of education during all of their stay. For a significant period of their day, or for a time of their stay, will also be spent receiving medical and therapeutic treatments. The situation is therefore not anomalous to that of a special school which has full time enrolments for educational purposes for the entire school day.

Educational provision in CAMHS units was reviewed in 2014 and my Department's policy is to provide teaching provision on the basis of a pupil teacher ratio of 6:1, which is currently provided in special schools and special classes for severe emotional disturbance. In medical facilities which do not have educational provision or where young people attend CAMHS Units as day patients, my Department's Home Tuition Scheme provides for compensatory teaching support to account for time missed from school.

My Department has no plans to further review the education provision provided to CAMHS Units at this time.

Educational Supports

139. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will liaise with Tusla to rectify a situation whereby a child with behavioural issues must be expelled from school in order to access more suitable services. [42899/17]

144. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures in place to support principals dealing with pupils who are misbehaving in the extreme, in some cases putting themselves or other students in danger through their behaviour. [42904/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 144 together.

My Department's policy is that the well-being and safety of children should be at the centre of all policy and practices in all schools. Responsibility for the management of behaviour in schools is a matter for individual schools.

The Board of Management of each school is responsible for the care and safety of all of the pupils in their school and is required to prepare a code of behaviour in accordance with Section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

This code of behaviour shall specify the procedure to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school. This code of behaviour should be available to all parents of students registered in the school.

Any proposal to exclude a student, through permanent exclusion, or suspension, is a serious measure and warranted only by very serious misbehaviour by any student. The Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) must be notified in writing of the Board of Management's intention to expel any student and must also provide their reasons for such action. In accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 no student shall be expelled from a school before the passing of 20 school days following the receipt of a written notification by an EWO. The EWO shall make reasonable efforts to meet with the principal, the student and his/her parents during this 20 day period.

Following from any permanent exclusion, it is open to a parent/guardian, or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student to take an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department or, in the case of an Education and Training Board (ETB) school, to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student, or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year.

My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a student, except in the case of

an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on my Department's website at the following link :

<http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Section-29-Appeals-Application-Form.doc>,

or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, phone 0761 108588.

The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with special educational needs can be provided with an education appropriate to their needs.

Where possible, provision is made for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs. My Department's policy is that students with special educational needs should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided.

In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are provided for.

Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years.

This year, 13,990 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary and post primary schools to the end of December, which is an increase of 32% in the number of posts available since 2011.

SNA Circular 0030/2014 details the circumstances in which SNA support will be provided for behaviour related care needs. SNA support will only be provided for behaviour related care needs where there is a clear diagnosis of Emotional Behavioural Disturbance/Severe Emotional Behavioural Disturbance, or a behavioural disorder in conjunction with another disability, and also where it is clear that behavioural management strategies have not been successful to date, and where it is demonstrated how access to SNA support can assist the student.

There are currently over 13,000 special educational needs teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools which includes an additional 900 teaching posts provided to support the introduction of the new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools from September 2017.

In addition, 169 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there are now over 1,300 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011. 1,042 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD (including 103 Early Intervention ASD special classes) and 11 cater specifically for students diagnosed with severe emotional behavioural disorders.

125 special schools also provide specialist education for those students with complex special educational needs, including students diagnosed with severe behavioural disorders.

Schools may seek advice from their local National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, from the NCSE's Support Service through the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), or the National Behavioural Support Service, as to how children with behavioural needs can best be supported in school.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) now also part of NCSE's Support Service, provides continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers working with students with special educational needs, including training for teachers in the area of challenging behaviour and Autism.

Many schools withdraw students occasionally from the main classroom for short periods of time in order to provide support to them, or to manage student behaviour, if a student is exhibiting behaviours which may be a danger to themselves or others.

In some circumstances, a student who is exhibiting extreme behaviours may be brought to another room to ensure the safety of other students and until they are calm again. Schools should supervise and support students who leave the classroom until they have recovered and are able to re-engage in the classroom.

Where used, it will normally form part of a school's response to behaviour and part of student support structures, procedures and practices.

The withdrawal of a student from the classroom in order to deal individually with the student does not require the authorisation of my Department. It is a matter for the school authorities, the student and the parents or guardians of the student concerned.

Some schools also have multi-sensory rooms that provide a variety of sensory stimuli and which are designed to provide sensory stimulation for students with special educational needs, in spaces which are designed to encourage positive actions and responses for students with sensory impairment. They can also be used for students to use interactive equipment towards specific educational aims.

Published guidelines which are available to schools include:

- Supporting Students with Behavioural, Emotional, and Social difficulties, which is available on the Department's website www.education.ie,

- the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines for schools on Developing a Code of Behaviour and the National Educational Psychological Services document Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties - a Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers.

The NCSE has published updated policy advice on the Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In developing this policy advice, the NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research.

The report includes 11 key Recommendations which focus on improvements which might be considered to the range of provisions which are currently available for children with Autism in schools. The report includes recommendations in relation to Crisis Situations. The report is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and external representatives to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered and that a timetable for implementation is prepared. The work of the Implementation Group is ongoing.

The NCSE are currently undertaking a Comprehensive Assessment of the SNA Scheme, which will examine the circumstances in which SNA support will be provided for behaviour related care needs.

In response to a progress report from the NCSE on the comprehensive assessment, I requested the NCSE to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing a better model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs. This Working Group has commenced its work and it will run in tandem with the completion of the overall Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. It is intended that the reports of the Working Group and of the Review will be completed in Spring 2018.

Special Educational Needs

140. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address concerns from schools regarding changes to student profiling (details supplied). [42900/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools which were published on 7th March 2017, set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools, introduced in all mainstream primary and post primary school in September 2017.

The revised allocation model replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The new model provides a single allocation to schools based on the profile. Schools are frontloaded with resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils who need such support.

The Circulars note that for the introduction of the new allocation model, from September 2017, the NCSE 'Low Incidence' allocations which had been made for each school during the preceding 2016/17 school year, have been used to establish the complex needs component of the new model for each school.

This means that on the introduction of the new allocation model and until allocations are reviewed, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, which is less than the allocation they had received to support pupils with Low Incidence special educational needs during the 2016/17 school year.

This also means that no allocation for pupils made by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that pupil remains in the school.

Whereas schools will have greater discretion as to how they can distribute resources under the new model, based on the individual needs of pupils, no reduction in allocations have been made to schools in respect of any pupils who were previously in receipt of a Low Incidence special needs allocation in that school.

A model for the identification of pupils with complex needs in future is being finalised by the NCSE, in consultation with the Health Service Executive and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)

This model will take account of the decision making process and qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children Disability Network Teams.

For the next re profiling of the model, the Complex Needs category will be the existing low incidence allocations for schools, less any leavers included in this category, plus additional allocations for any new complex needs category pupils, over the period of time since the first school profiles were developed, to the point of the next re-profiling of the model.

Under the new allocation model schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This will reduce the administrative burden on schools as schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

My Department has issued guidelines for schools to support them in the management of their SEN teaching resources. These guidelines are available on my Departments website.

Schools are encouraged to take guidelines on board in the planning process for the 2017/18 school year. In order to determine the levels of need within each school, it will be important for schools to have properly identified students with additional learning needs and have developed plans for each student indicating how the supports available will be used.

Responsibility for the management of behaviour in schools is a matter for individual schools. The Board of Management of each school is responsible for the care and safety of all of the pupils in their school and is required to prepare a code of behaviour in accordance with Section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

This code of behaviour shall specify the procedure to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school. This code of behaviour should be available to all parents of pupils registered in the school.

The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with special educational needs can be provided with an education appropriate to their needs.

Where possible, provision is made for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs. Department policy is that students with special educational needs should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided.

In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are provided for.

Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years.

There are currently over 13,000 special educational Needs teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools with an additional 900 teaching posts provided to support the introduction of the new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools from September 2017.

This year, 13,990 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary and post primary schools to the end of the 2016/17 school year, which is an increase of 32% in the number of posts available since 2011. SNA Circular 0030/2014 details the circumstances in which SNA support will be provided for behaviour related care needs. SNA support will only be provided for behaviour related care needs where there is a clear diagnosis of Emotional Behavioural Disturbance/Severe Emotional Behavioural Disturbance, or a behavioural disorder

in conjunction with another disability, and also where it is clear that behavioural management strategies have not been successful to date, and where it is demonstrated how access to SNA support can assist the child.

As the Deputy may be aware, the NCSE are currently undertaking a Comprehensive Assessment of the SNA Scheme. In response to a progress report from the NCSE on the comprehensive assessment, I requested the NCSE to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing a better model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs.

This Working Group has commenced its work and it will run in tandem with the completion of the overall Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. It is intended that the reports of the Working Group and of the Review will be completed in Spring 2018.

Schools may seek advice from their local National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, from the NCSE's Support Service through the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), or from the National Behavioural Support Services, as to how children with behavioural needs can best be supported in school.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) now also part of NCSE's Support Service, provides continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers working with students with special educational needs, including training for teachers in the area of challenging behaviour and Autism. My Department is also currently examining the issue of developing guidelines for schools on the specific issue of restraint or intervention.

Published guidelines which are available to schools include:

- Supporting Students with Behavioural, Emotional, and Social difficulties, which is available on the Department's website www.education.ie;
- the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines for schools on Developing a Code of Behaviour and the National Educational Psychological Services document Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties - a Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers.

Teacher Recruitment

141. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans in place to deal with the critical shortage of substitute teachers; and his further plans to tackle the shortage of Irish language teachers in secondary schools. [42901/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In overall terms, my Department has no evidence of a recent or current shortage of primary teachers. However, I am aware that some schools have experienced difficulty in recruiting adequately qualified substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

The final report of the Technical Working Group on teacher supply, 'Striking the Balance' was published on 9th June 2017. The report focusses on the development of a model of primary teacher supply, while outlining the work which will be required to establish a sustainable long term model of post primary teacher supply. In considering the model of teacher supply at primary level the report took account of many variables, including the number of additional teachers required to cover for teacher absences, such as illness, maternity leave, career break or secondment.

The report sets out an approach to planning the work necessary to develop a model for achieving a better balance between teacher supply and demand in the medium to long term.

Officials of my Department are now considering how the development of a model can be progressed, from within available resources. The necessary actions will include engagement with the HEA in order to ensure that the supply of teachers meets demand and there is the correct balance of teachers in each of the various subject areas at post primary level, as well as measures to address data requirements, particularly at post primary level.

The Deputy will be aware that, in conjunction with the publication of the report, I announced a number of measures to increase the pool of teachers available to schools, in particular to fill short term vacancies. With regard to these measures, my Department informed all teachers retiring in 2017 that in order to remain eligible for employment in a state funded teaching post for a period of more than five consecutive days or to supervise the State examinations, a teacher must maintain his/her registration with the Teaching Council. In that regard, the Teaching Council also reminds teachers, through the renewal of registration process and where a teacher indicates that he or she is considering leaving the register, that if they wish to continue to work as a teacher following retirement in substitute and other positions they should maintain registration.

The Deputy should note also that my Department has increased the limits for employment while on career break at post primary level to a maximum of 300 hours in a school year and at primary level to a maximum of 90 days in a school year. The matter of the employment of B Ed and PME students in limited circumstances on a short term basis is still under consideration in my Department.

It should also be noted that one of the main aims of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is to improve the quality of teaching through Irish. The identified actions in the Policy to achieve this aim includes increasing the number of places available on the existing Irish medium post primary Initial Teacher Education programme and the granting of two additional post to the Post-graduate Masters in Education in NUI Galway to increase teacher supply at post-primary level and strengthen Irish-language proficiency of newly qualified teachers across a range of subjects. It is anticipated that these action should also increase the supply of Irish language teachers.

Mental Health Services

142. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to tackle the shortage of behavioural therapists in some regions and the two year waiting list experienced by students to access the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, CAMHS. [42902/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that the provision of behavioural therapies falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health and the service is provided through the Health Service Executive (HSE). Any queries in this regard should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Special Educational Needs

143. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is appropriate for a child who has had the benefit of a special needs assistant, SNA, in national school to then go onto secondary school with no form of assistance. [42903/17]

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

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

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

The Circular sets out that a key goal of SNA support is to help children to develop independent living skills, and that continued and ongoing access to SNA support is generally not desirable for post-primary students, unless essential, as it can impede their independence and socialisation needs at an important developmental stage of their life. Accordingly, whereas SNA support will be provided to post primary schools when required, only pupils with chronic and serious care needs will normally be allocated SNA support in post primary schools.

In considering applications for SNA support from post primary schools, the NCSE will take into account the importance of the requirement to allocate necessary care supports with the right of a child to acquire personal independence skills.

The level of SNA support allocated to all schools can change from year to year, as students with care needs leave the school, as new students with care needs enrol, or as students develop more independent living skills as they get older and their care needs diminish over time.

All schools have been advised of their allocations for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf.

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

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that my Department's policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying DES policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned

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

Question No. 144 answered with Question No. 139.

Questions - Written Answers
Special Educational Needs

145. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the two and a half year waiting list for access to a behavioural support unit at primary school level. [42905/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with severe emotional behavioural disturbance, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there. Enrolment in a special class can be considered for these students where it has been demonstrated that he/she is unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports.

Others students may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 130% from 548 to 1,300 across the country now, of which 1,042 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes and 11 special classes cater specifically for Severe Emotional Behavioural Disturbance.

The NCSE, which is an independent statutory agency, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special school and class placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Needs Unit (SNU) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. Typically, a two classroom SNU is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom unit is provided in new post primary schools.

In the case of existing schools, where a school is not in a position to accommodate a special class within its existing accommodation, it is open to the school to submit an application to the Department for capital funding to (i) re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class or (ii) to construct additional accommodation.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that any required additional special class placements will be available for the forthcoming school years.

Teachers' Remuneration

146. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the imbalance in the teachers' pay scale which is seeing young graduates leave Ireland to take up more profitable positions abroad; and the timeframe for rectifying this imbalance. [42906/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. A previous Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. This decision also required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale, which in the case of teachers had the effect of reducing their starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreements have, to date, restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and apprenticeships.

As a result of these changes and taking into account the proposed pay measures under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the starting salary of a new teacher from 1 January 2018 will be €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. If full equalisation was achieved the starting salary for a post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 would be €43,879 and for a primary teacher would be €41,511.

Further to this, newly recruited teachers benefit from the terms of the Ward Circular which reduced the qualifying period from a CID and the removal of the career break and secondment categories of objective grounds which had previously prevented some teachers from gaining CIDs. In addition to earlier permanency, other measures of benefit to newly recruited teachers included a revised sequence for the filling of posts to enable fixed-term and part time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more quickly and easier than before.

It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost (including new entrants recruited this September) would be in the order of €130 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind, for example equality between public servant and people who work elsewhere or don't work at all. It would

not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectoral issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Accordingly, the recently concluded draft Public Service Agreement 2018-2020 includes a provision in relation to new entrants which states that an examination of the remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades covered by parties to the Agreement will be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

Question No. 147 answered with Question No. 92.

Schools Administration

148. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide greater access to administration services for smaller schools that have a teaching principal (details supplied). [42908/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Circular 12/2016, which is available on the Department website, outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

Any further enhancements to the Principal Release Time Scheme, will have to be considered in the context of the budgetary process.

School Funding

149. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has given consideration to providing funding and grants to schools in one payment either in January or at the start of the school term (details supplied). [42909/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware my Department issues grants to schools in instalments throughout the school year. Good budgeting by Boards of Management should ensure that funding and grants received during the year are managed to cater for costs arising throughout the school year.

A change in these arrangements would not result in an overall increase in funding to schools.

However, given that my Department's funding from the Exchequer operates on a calendar year basis, there would be an additional cost associated with a change in the instalment arrangements. There is no capacity within current budgets to manage such a change.

Teacher Training Provision

150. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will liaise with universities to ensure that teaching qualifications which are required are prioritised by third level institutions. [42910/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that the final report of the Technical Working Group on teacher supply, ‘Striking the Balance’ was published on 9th June 2017. The report focusses on the development of a model of primary teacher supply, while outlining the work which will be required to establish a sustainable long term model of post primary teacher supply. The report sets out an approach to planning the work necessary to develop a model for achieving a better balance between teacher supply and demand in the medium to long term.

Officials of my Department are now considering how the development of a model can be progressed, from within available resources. The necessary actions will include engagement with the Higher Education Authority in order to ensure that the supply of teachers meets demand and there is the correct balance of teachers in each of the various subject areas at post primary level, as well as measures to address data requirements, particularly at post primary level.

Primary Online Database

151. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the issue whereby the pupils of a special needs school are automatically listed on the primary online database (details supplied). [42911/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of the Primary On-line Database (POD) and the Post Primary On-line Database (PPOD) is to monitor the progress of children through the education system in order to ensure that every student can meet their educational potential, and to ensure that every child of compulsory school age is in receipt of an education. POD data underpins the provision of education in primary schools, including special schools while PPOD underpins the provision of education in post primary schools. When the data from schools is verified, it is used as the basis for the provision of capitation grants, teacher and other resource allocation to schools, and provision of examination numbers from the State Examination Commission.

All Special Schools funded by my Department are currently established as primary schools which cater for children and young people with complex special educational needs from the age of 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

In the majority of special schools, the primary curriculum, modified as appropriate, is offered, to cater for the abilities and complexity of special educational needs of students attending special schools. Within this framework / provision, a special school may opt to provide certificate type programmes, FETAC, Junior Cycle, LCA, ASDAN, etc.

While it is a matter for school authorities to determine the school’s staffing requirements in accordance with the curricular requirements of the cohort of students attending the school, special schools employ primary qualified teachers who have general training around child development, with an emphasis on developing communication and literacy and numeracy as well as the initial teacher education experience in music, physical education, and the arts and drama. Primary teachers are qualified to teach a wide range of curriculum areas in special schools. In some special schools, post-primary qualified teachers who are specialists in a limited number of subject areas can be employed to cater for specialised subjects such as woodwork and home economics and leaving certificate level subjects.

Schools Administration

152. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the shortage of middle management positions across the school system. [42912/17]

153. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the level of policy change and scheme roll out which is having a severe effect on time management across schools. [42913/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 153 together.

Budget 2017 provided for a new package of support for school leadership, including middle management posts for primary and post primary schools.

My department recently issued circular 0063/2017 Leadership and Management in Primary schools which sets out a framework for posts in recognised primary schools.

The commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model means that the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts has been lifted and all primary schools can now fill middle management posts in line with circular 0063/2017. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

Discussions are ongoing with the post primary education partners with the view to agreement and publication of a circular as soon as possible.

School Accommodation

154. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the design criteria for special needs facilities in schools in view of the fact in some instances classrooms are designed on a large scale and certain students may require much smaller surroundings. [42914/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the suite of accommodation provided in the design of special needs facilities typically includes a range of room sizes, including smaller ancillary spaces that allows for flexibility of both current and future use.

Special Educational Needs

155. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to examine the treatment of pupils diagnosed with behavioural or learning difficulties in view of the fact that in many instances a diagnosis is given after a long period of time, with no follow-on treatment. [42915/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with special educational needs, including children with behavioural or learning difficulties can be provided with an education appropriate to their needs.

Where possible, provision is made for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs. My Department's policy is that students with special educational needs should

be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided.

In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are provided for.

Funding for special education provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years.

There are currently over 13,000 special educational needs teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools which includes an additional 900 teaching posts provided to support the introduction of the new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools from September 2017.

This year, 13,990 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to primary and post primary schools to the end of December, which is an increase of 32% in the number of posts available since 2011.

In addition, 169 new Special Classes have been opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there are now over 1,300 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011. 1,042 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD (including 103 Early Intervention ASD special classes) and 11 cater specifically for students diagnosed with severe emotional behavioural disorders.

125 special schools also provide specialist education for those students with complex special educational needs.

Schools may seek advice from their local National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, from the NCSE's Support Service through the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO), or the National Behavioural Support Service, as to how children with behavioural needs can best be supported in school.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) now also part of NCSE's Support Service, provides continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers working with students with special educational needs, including training for teachers in the area of challenging behaviour, educational needs, including students diagnosed with severe behavioural disorders.

My Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides service to primary and post-primary schools countrywide. In general schools may prioritise the service they receive from NEPS to support children with learning and/or behavioural difficulties. NEPS assists schools to identify needs, and appropriate interventions, to review the efficacy of these interventions and to adjust approaches used for these children, through the use of a student support planning process.

The provision of direct treatment or therapies to children does not lie within the remit of my Department, to teachers or NEPS psychologist, per se, but in fact to the range of therapeutic services provided by the H.S.E.. It is to my colleague, the Minister for Health, therefore that I would advise that the Deputy's question be directed in this regard.

English Language Training Organisations

156. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process

for English language schools to become accredited by the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services, ACELS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42931/17]

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services, ACELS, is currently taking new applications for accreditation from English language schools; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of providers are anxious to secure ACELS accreditation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42932/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 156 and 157 together.

ACELS (the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services) is a voluntary national scheme responsible for the recognition and inspection of English language schools. It is administered by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). ACELS has been closed for new applications since January 2014 and it continues to operate on a voluntary, contractual basis for existing members.

The Deputy may be aware that a series of reforms to the student immigration system for international education have been implemented by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department, in line with the Government decision of 19th May 2015. The key reforms include the restriction of the list of education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to students to live and work in Ireland (known as the Interim List of Eligible Programmes – the ILEP).

As part of this process all providers of English language training wishing to recruit non-EEA students are now required to apply to the Department of Justice and Equality for inclusion on the ILEP. Further details on the ILEP criteria and application process are available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) at: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Interim%20List%20of%20Eligible%20Programmes%20-%20ILEP>.

It is important to note that the holding of ACELS recognition is not a pre-requisite for inclusion on the ILEP. English language schools without ACELS recognition are eligible to apply for inclusion on the ILEP. The first full iteration of the ILEP was published by the Department of Justice and Equality on 20th January 2016 and the ILEP is updated at regular intervals by that Department.

The ILEP is an interim measure until the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) for the provision of education to international learners, which is a core component of Government policy for the international education sector. The legislative amendments necessary to facilitate the introduction of the IEM are being progressed by my Department.

Special Educational Needs Staff

158. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an additional SNA will be approved for a school (details supplied). [42949/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

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

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

All schools have been advised of their allocations for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at:

http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Allocation-Primary.pdf

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

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that my Department's policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying DES policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

As the matter raised in this question refers to an individual school, I have arranged for the NCSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Special Educational Needs

159. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter raised in correspondence by a secondary school (details supplied) in County Cork in relation to special needs supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42959/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that under the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support which includes a base-line allocation for the school and an allocation based on the school's profile.

Details of the manner in which the allocations have been provided to schools are set out in my Departments Circulars 0013 and 0014 2017.

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

The school referred to in this question received an allocation of 49.55 hours special education teaching support, based on its school profile, and an enrolment of 45 pupils at the time the school profile was developed.

This is a substantial allocation of hours for a school of this size, which equates to over two special education teachers, to support a pupil enrolment of 45.

Whereas the profiled allocation had indicated a need of 35 hours for this school, based on its school profile and size, and relative to the profiled needs of all other schools, the school was allocated 49.55 hours, which was equivalent to the allocation the school received in the 2016/17 school year.

The school therefore has a retained element of 14.55 special education teachers hours within its allocation.

It is acknowledged and accepted that schools will have some additional pupils with special educational needs enrolling to their school subsequent to the profiles having been developed.

However, for the most part these will be balanced by the fact that some students who had additional teaching needs in the previous year will have left the school. The baseline is also designed to ensure that schools have some capacity to provide additional support to pupils. This school also has some additional capacity in the retained element of its allocation to absorb additional pupil movement.

Schools will therefore no longer have to make applications, for newly enrolled pupils for whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

It should be noted that this is a brand new model of allocation and is not comparable to the previous model which had been in place.

By using a broad range of attainment and socio-economic criteria, it is expected that generally, a school's profile will remain relatively constant from year to year. Each year, some students with additional teaching needs will leave and others will enrol, broadly balancing the school profile. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

A process has also been put in place to address circumstances where the school profile significantly changed following the allocation process due to the fact that the school had rapidly developing status where the net enrolment numbers significantly increased.

This process also takes into account the position for new schools who may be rapidly expanding.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in DES Circular 17/2017 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) and DES 10,11,12/2017 (Post Primary School Staffing Schedule).

Schools who have qualified for additional mainstream developing school posts on the basis of developing growth in accordance with these criteria will also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

My Department has also issued guidelines for schools to support them in the management of their resources. These guidelines are available on my Departments website.

Schools are encouraged to take guidelines on board in the planning process for the 2017/18 school year. In order to determine the levels of need within each school, it will be important for schools to have properly identified students with additional learning needs and have developed

plans for each student indicating how the supports available will be used.

In this context, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will be available to support schools where these plans have been developed and implemented but the school considers that further support may be required. This support may involve Continuing Professional Development or further training for school staff, advice in relation to the support plan that is in place, and possibly a review process once schools can clearly demonstrate that exceptional circumstances have arisen in the school.

The NCSE will shortly be advising how schools can seek a review of the utilisation of their allocations in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

The exceptional circumstances cited by this school can be considered as part of this review process.

Finally, in relation to the provision of a special class in the school, I wish to advise that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE continues to establish additional special classes to support children with Special Educational Needs, including Autism as required.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

The NCSE will liaise with the school referred to by the Deputy to establish whether there is a need to open a special class for pupils with Autism in this school, prior to the moving of the school to its new temporary location, and taking account of current special class placement availability in the local area.

Schools Building Projects Status

160. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43020/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

The preparatory work required to initiate the architectural planning process for this building project is currently underway and as part of this process, my Department recently met with the Local Authority.

My Department will be in further contact with the school authority during the architectural planning process.

Teaching Qualifications

161. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason secondary teachers are required to complete a two year masters degree to qualify rather than a higher diploma; and his views on whether this is leading to cost pressures on young graduates. [42202/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recommendations for changes to initial teacher education were included in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 and were incorporated into the Teaching Council's "Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education" and "Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers".

At post-primary level the content of courses has been reconfigured and their duration increased to two years. The decision to designate the reconfigured and extended programmes at Masters level was taken by the higher education institutions involved; my Department was not involved in this decision. However, I support the changes which, as I have already stated, are in line with the recommendations of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and aim to ensure that newly qualified teachers are better equipped for the needs of the modern day classroom.

The Deputy may wish to note that students entering post graduate programmes who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible to have their post-graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit of €6,270. Alternatively, a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of their fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2017/18 academic year, increasing relative to the number of family dependents.

In addition, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended.

Tax relief also is available on postgraduate tuition fees. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners.

Teacher Data

162. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the predicted requirement in each of the next three years for new primary school teachers due only to demographic pressures. [42203/17]

163. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the predicted requirement for new secondary school teachers in each of the next three years due only to demographic pressures. [42204/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 163 together.

Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The criteria for the allocation of posts are communicated to schools annually and are available on the Department website.

The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous

30 September.

The published staffing arrangements include the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment for the following September.

Budgets 2016 and 2017 provided c. 1500 posts to meet rising demographic needs at both primary and post primary level.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department consistently monitors demographics to identify where additional teaching posts will be required.

Projections of teacher numbers for the next 3 years are currently being updated as part of the Budget process.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

164. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the predicted requirement in each of the next three years for new SNAs due only to demographic pressures. [42205/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service (IGEES) published a Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) of Data on Special Needs Assistants in August 2016 which is available at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Value-For-Money-Reviews/>.

This FPA forms part of my Department's commitment to the Public Spending Code (PSC) and evidence informed policy making.

One of the objectives of the FPA was to identify what is required to develop the forecasting capacity of the Department and the NCSE in order to anticipate the level of demand and cost of future SNA requirements and that the provision of this data would be aligned with the planning needs of my Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the NCSE with specific reference to the annual budgetary process.

The report found that the primary drivers of the increase in demand for SNAs were:

- The underlying change in the school-age population
- The ratio of students to SNAs
- Increased number of students with an ASD diagnosis

The FPA report recommended that the NCSE provide an End of Year Statement of Demand and a forecast of future demand in mid-April each year, with an updated forecast by mid-June to take account of trends arising during the current year's application process.

In addition, the method of provision for the additional SNA posts this year has been similar to that for the past six years when decisions were made in late June or early July. This is not a satisfactory approach and in this year's estimates and in future years, provision will be made for the anticipated extra need in the same way as for other elements of the education system. This will allow for SNA allocations to be notified to schools earlier than in recent years.

Demand over the next 3 years cannot be accurately estimated until the NCSE provides its forecast of future demand for consideration in each of the next 3 years.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

165. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department collects data on the number of children turned down annually for speech and language classes in primary schools despite meeting the qualifying criteria; and if so, the data for each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [42207/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for the provision of special educational needs supports to schools, including the provision of special classes in mainstream schools.

Applications to establish speech and language special classes are considered by the school's assigned Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and those meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the NCSE. The criteria for enrolment in a Special Class for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) is set out in my Department's Circular 0038/2007.

Students with SSLD have access to speech and language therapy services either through the speech and language therapy services provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE), in a special SSLD class setting or through the HSE primary care service. The provision of health supports, including Speech and Language Therapy services, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive.

A full-time teacher is assigned to each class, and classes operate with a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 7:1. A minimum number of five eligible pupils is required for a school to retain a SSLD class. Eligible pupils may spend up to two years in such classes.

The NCSE continues to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas and has capacity to establish such new special classes where necessary, subject to the willingness of schools to open classes. The NCSE welcomes expressions of interest from schools in opening special classes to meet the demand for special class provision. In deciding on the location of a special class SENOs take into account both the present and the future potential need for special class provision and they must be satisfied that the special class is sustainable and appropriately located. SENOs liaise with relevant professionals in their area to arrive at an informed decision. The opening of a Speech and Language class is, however, contingent on the HSE being in a position to provide Speech and Language therapy to the students in the class.

The enrolment of pupils in an SSLD special class is managed locally by an Admissions & Discharges Committee, comprising the Speech and Language Therapy Manager, Speech and Language Therapist, Class Teacher and Principal.

It should be noted that pupils who are not enrolled in a special class for SSLD and who meet the criteria for Specific Speech and Language Disorder, as outlined in Circular 0038/2007, may qualify for additional teaching support under the School's Special Education Teaching Support provision, where he/she is enrolled in a mainstream school.

A new model for allocating support to pupils with special educational needs has been implemented from September 2017. Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools which was published on 7th March 2017 sets out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools. The revised allocation model replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educa-

tional needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities. Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers have also been published;

<http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf>.

One of the benefits of this new approach is that schools will have greater flexibility as to how they will deploy their resources.

Pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) may, therefore, attend a special class for pupils with SSLD with speech and language therapy services provided in class by the HSE or attend a mainstream school with additional teaching supports and speech & language therapy through the primary care service.

The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to establish a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy and to examine the adequacy of the present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties and early intervention.

A joint working group, made up of the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills, the Health Service Executive and the National Council for Special Education, has been established to develop the proposed model. When finalised, the proposed model will represent a significant change in the way in which services are delivered.

The information requested by the Deputy is not available, as the NCSE retains data on the number of special classes and the number of students attending only.

Schools Grievance Procedures

166. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that in certain cases school boards of management are taking judicial review proceedings to challenge the findings of section 29 appeals against refusals to enrol children in speech and language classes; and his further views on whether this is an appropriate use of public funds. [42208/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following every section 29 appeal hearing the determination is issued together with a cover letter to both parties to the section 29 appeal, on behalf of the Secretary General of this Department. This determination outlines the outcome of the appeal, that is: upheld, not upheld or upheld in part.

Following from this, it is open to either party to the appeal to seek leave to take a Judicial review. Judicial review is the process by which any aggrieved party, including an individual or a legal person, can test in the High Court the legality of administrative decisions, once the applicant has been sufficiently affected and the dispute comes within the public law domain.

Magdalen Laundries

167. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional persons have been added to the list since Caranua was established over and above those identi-

fied in the Quirke report; if so, the number; the criteria used; the years in which this occurred; if new persons were included; if resources were provided to cover this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42230/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I think the Deputy may be referring to the Magdalen Laundries Restorative Justice Ex Gratia Scheme which was set up by the Department of Justice and Equality following the publication of the report in February, 2013 of an Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of the State's involvement with the Magdalen Laundries. It was chaired by then Senator Martin McAleese and it is commonly referred to as the McAleese report. The material in the Report relates to 10 different institutions which were run by 4 different Orders of nuns over a period of 70 years. Although there was no finding in the McAleese Report which indicated that the State had any liability in the matter, following the report's publication the Taoiseach issued a State apology to the women.

Mr. Justice Quirke was subsequently asked by the Government to make recommendations on an appropriate redress scheme for those who were in the 10 Magdalen laundries that were the subject of the McAleese Report. The Government also included in the scheme the laundry that was attached to Stanhope Street Training School and later also decided to include a 12th institution, the Training School in Summerhill.

The Scheme provides for lump sum payments varying from €11,500 to €100,000 depending on the length of stay in the institution concerned. Further, each woman is entitled to a top-up payment to bring her weekly income from the Irish State up to the equivalent of the Irish Contributory Pension. The Scheme is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality.

Caranua was established under the 2012 Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act to manage €110 million pledged by religious congregations to enhance the lives of survivors who had suffered abuse as children in Institutions listed in schedules to the 2002 Residential Institutions Redress Act where the State was acting *in loco parentis*. To be eligible to apply to Caranua, a person must have received an award through settlement, Court or the Residential Institutions Redress Board in relation to time spent in one of these institutions. The Magdalen laundries are not included.

Schools Facilities

168. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will allocate funding for parking facilities at a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42232/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving correspondence from the school to which he refers relating to the facilities in question.

Teachers' Professional Development

169. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reintroduce financial support for student primary teachers in respect of attendance at a mandatory course (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42246/17]

170. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reintroduce financial support for students of primary teaching for the mandatory Gaeltacht course (details

supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42255/17]

171. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reinstate support for student primary teachers towards the cost of mandatory Gaeltacht courses (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42256/17]

173. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reinstate the support subsidies for primary school teachers who undertake residential Gaeltacht courses as part of their teacher training that were cut in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42272/17]

174. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore subsidies for student teachers attendance at mandatory Gaeltacht courses which would help to alleviate the burden of these expenses on students. [42274/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169, 170, 171, 173 and 174 together.

The decision to stop the Gaeltacht placement grants was taken during the economic crisis when, unfortunately, very difficult decisions had to be made to stabilise the nation's finances. Priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible, which remains particularly challenging with rising numbers of school-going children. My Department does not have the funding available to restore this support.

It should be noted that, to assist with the costs of the Gaeltacht placement, students who are in receipt of a student grant which includes a 100% fee grant, or who would have qualified for a full fee grant but for the Free Fees Schemes, can apply for funding towards travel and accommodation costs under the field trip element of a fee grant, subject to the normal terms and conditions of the student grant scheme.

Apart from this, in circumstances of particular need, students may apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. Information in relation to this fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

172. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of support hours for pupils at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42260/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that under the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support which includes a base-line allocation for the school and an allocation based on the school's profile.

Details of the manner in which the allocations have been provided to schools are set out in my Departments Circulars 0013 and 0014 2017

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the school referred to in his question received an allocation of 46.03 hours special education teaching support, based on its school profile and an enrolment

of 69 pupils at the time that the school profile developed. This is a substantial allocation of hours for a school of this size.

Whereas the profiled allocation had indicated a need of 45 hours for this school, based on its school profile and size, and relative to the profiled needs of all other schools, the school was allocated 46.03 hours, which was equivalent to the allocation the school received in 2016/17. There has therefore been no reduction to the allocation for this school.

It is acknowledged and accepted that schools will have some additional pupils with special educational needs enrolling to their school subsequent to the profiles having been developed.

However, for the most part these will be balanced by the fact that some students who had additional teaching needs in the previous year will have left the school. The baseline is also designed to ensure that schools have some capacity to provide additional support to pupils. This school also has some additional capacity in the retained element of its allocation which is above that indicated by the school profile.

Under the new allocation model schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This will reduce the administrative burden on schools as schools will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

Schools will therefore no longer have to make applications, for newly enrolled pupils for whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

The new allocations to schools include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

It should be noted that this is a brand new model of allocation and is not comparable to the previous model which had been in place.

By using a broad range of attainment and socio-economic criteria, it is expected that generally, a school's profile will remain relatively constant from year to year. Each year, some students with additional teaching needs will leave and others will enrol, broadly balancing the school profile. Resources allocated under this model will not normally be adjusted between allocations.

A process has also been put in place to address circumstances where the school profile significantly changed following the allocation process due to the fact that the school had rapidly developing status where the net enrolment numbers significantly increased.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in DES Circular 17/2017 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) and DES 10,11,12/2017 (Post Primary School Staffing Schedule).

Schools who have qualified for additional mainstream developing school posts on the basis of developing growth in accordance with these criteria will also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

My Department has issued guidelines for schools to support them in the management of

their resources. These guidelines are available on my Departments website.

Schools are encouraged to take guidelines on board in the planning process for the 2017/18 school year. In order to determine the levels of need within each school, it will be important for schools to have properly identified students with additional learning needs and have developed plans for each student indicating how the supports available will be used.

In this context, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will be available to support schools where these plans have been developed and implemented but the school considers that further support may be required. This support may involve Continuing Professional Development or further training for school staff, advice in relation to the support plan that is in place, and possibly a review process once schools can clearly demonstrate that exceptional circumstances have arisen in the school.

The NCSE will shortly be advising how schools can seek a review of the utilisation of their allocations in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

Questions Nos. 173 and 174 answered with Question No. 169.

Lobbying Data

175. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42289/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015, all lobbyists are required to register with *www.lobbying.ie* and details of all lobbying activity are publicly available on that site.

I have had no meetings with any lobbyists in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) bill since March 2016.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

176. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of early years playschools in County Kildare for children with developmental difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42322/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the Deputy has clarified that she is referring to the number of early intervention classes for children with autism in County Kildare.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is the body responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including establishing ASD early intervention classes and special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

There are currently 130 Early Intervention classes for children with ASD in recognised primary and special schools, 6 of which are in County Kildare. Early Intervention classes are supported with a pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1 and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally

amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

From the age of three children with autism (who will not reach the age of 6 during the current school year) can enrol in these early intervention settings. Where such a placement is not available home tuition can be provided.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents/guardians of the child and the Board of Management of a school.

However, parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The SENO can also advise parents in relation to supports which may be available to support children with special educational needs, including special transport arrangements which may be made available. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are also available on www.ncse.ie.

The Deputy may be aware that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs provides supports for childcare, including pre-school education.

The principal vehicle for the delivery of pre-school education is the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which was introduced in January 2010 and provides for early learning in a formal setting to children in the year before they commence primary school.

Children with disabilities have access to pre-school services under a new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme of supports, which was announced in June 2016, by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child and the pre-school.

Details of the supports which are available under AIM can be found at www.preschoolaccess.ie which contains comprehensive information on the access and inclusion model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports. For children attending a private pre-school through the ECCE programme, questions relating to the AIM supports should be addressed to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

School Accommodation

177. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the allocation for the provision of a multi purpose room which is needed for the pupils and staff of a school (details supplied); if approval will be given; the timeframe involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42324/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department received an application from the school referred to by the Deputy for a General Purpose room.

Due to the competing demands on the Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding towards the provision of essential school classroom accommodation, it is not possible at this point to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of fund-

ing for the GP room in question. The school concerned has been advised of this position.

School Accommodation

178. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will receive approval for funding for new facilities. [42326/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department received a major capital application from the school to which the Deputy refers for the development of a new school building.

A project for the school has not been included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme and it is, therefore, not possible to provide an indicative timeframe for the delivery of a major project for the school at this time.

However, my Department has recently granted approval in principle to the school for the provision of additional rented accommodation to facilitate the appointment of a developing teaching post. The school has submitted costs in respect of the accommodation which are currently being considered by my Department.

School Transport Applications Data

179. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils who have applied for concessionary school transport for the current school year, by county; the number who were granted and refused respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42341/17]

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.

The information requested is as follows.

Concessionary school transport for 2017/18 School Year

County	No. of Applications	No. of Tickets issued	No Seats Available
Carlow	772	624	12
Cavan	1025	750	12
Clare	720	590	0
Cork	3790	3073	104
Donegal	2238	1916	11
Dublin	441	286	3
Galway	2479	1981	32
Kerry	1515	1326	11
Kildare	1775	1274	31
Kilkenny	1383	1191	49

Questions - Written Answers

County	No. of Applications	No. of Tickets issued	No Seats Available
Laois	411	323	16
Leitrim	703	620	1
Limerick	1211	1032	10
Longford	822	696	4
Louth	756	520	0
Mayo	1387	1063	9
Meath	1856	1380	72
Monaghan	901	626	15
Offaly	1067	884	5
Roscommon	582	476	0
Sligo	672	590	1
Tipperary	1709	1410	15
Waterford	650	525	19
Westmeath	891	706	17
Wexford	2032	1640	34
Wicklow	1054	784	21
Grand Total	32842	26286	504

DEIS Scheme

180. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the threshold for the appointment of an administrative principal for rural DEIS schools is higher than other DEIS schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42343/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As outlined in the Report on the Review of DEIS published by my Department in February ongoing research has shown that there is a clear distinction between urban and rural disadvantage. While socio-economic disadvantage exists in rural areas, these studies have shown it does not have the same impact on educational outcomes as it does in urban areas.

Consideration of the rural/urban context and the innate differences of the two in terms of educational outcomes as evidenced in research, together with the particular educational needs of certain vulnerable groups is relevant in terms of the nature and the type of resources required to meet particular needs. The Report on the Review of DEIS is available on my Department's website at the following link : <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Review-Report.pdf>

I wish to advise the Deputy that the current School Support Programme provides for the appointment of an Administrative Principal on an enrolment of 116 pupils in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools and 144 pupils in a DEIS Urban Band 2 school as opposed to an enrolment of 177 pupils in rural DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

The full list of supports and resources available to DEIS schools is available on my Department's website at the following link:<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Supporting-Information/Supports-to-DEIS-Schools.html>.

DEIS Data

181. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the differences in the funding or other supports available under each of the different categories of DEIS school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42345/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative aimed at tackling educational disadvantage and provides funding and supports for schools identified as having the highest concentrations of pupils at greatest risk of educational disadvantage.

DEIS is provided in both Primary and Post Primary schools with DEIS Primary Schools broken down into three different categories:

- Urban Band 1
- Urban Band 2
- Rural.

Supports available for each category are listed on page 56 and 57 of the DEIS Plan 2017 under Appendices - Appendix 1 – Supports Provided under the DEIS School Support Programme 2017, available at the following link

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/DEIS-Plan-2017.pdf>

The supports are also listed on my Department's website.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Supporting-Information/Supports-to-DEIS-Schools.html>

DEIS Scheme

182. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that currently have rural DEIS status, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42346/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The list of schools that have DEIS status including those requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis_school_list.xls

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

183. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason inconsistent overtime payments are taken into consideration by SUSI when determining applications in view of the fact that these overtime payments are usually achieved by parents of students preparing to send children to third level. [42369/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally. The assessment of income from the same starting point is deemed to be

fair and reasonable because this approach eliminates any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households. All earnings including overtime must be assessed for the calculation of reckonable income.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for higher income thresholds for larger families. In addition to this, further increases in the income thresholds are provided for where additional family members are attending further and/or higher education at the same time.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie

Employment Rights

184. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he has taken in relation to investigating bogus self employment contracts in the English language teaching sector here (details supplied). [42375/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract. Issues relating to employment contracts and working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department.

There is an extensive range of legislation in Ireland which protects the employment rights of workers, including English language teachers, in relation to employment contracts, payment of wages and related matters. It is the responsibility of the employer in the first instance to ensure that their employees receive their employment rights. Where an employee considers that their employment rights have been breached they may bring a claim under the appropriate legislation to the Workplace Relations Commission. The Workplace Relations Commission has a range of services available including adjudication, inspection and advisory.

Brexit Issues

185. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the third plenary session of the All Island Civic Dialogue; and the actions that will be taken after same. [42990/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The third plenary session of the All Island Civic Dialogue took place on Thursday 28 September in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham and brought together almost 300 representatives across industry and civil society to discuss the challenges and opportunities posed by the decision of the UK to leave the European Union. This event focused on the impact of Brexit on enterprise and society on the island and the steps taken by organisations to become ‘Brexit-ready’. There was also a discus-

sion on the future of Europe. This session followed two successful plenary sessions held last November and February. There have also been 19 sectoral dialogues in locations across the country to discuss the impact of Brexit on specific areas including Agri-Food, Transport, Energy, Tourism and Hospitality, and Education. The most recent sectoral dialogue on cross-border health co-operation took place in Dundalk on September 8. The All-Island Civic Dialogue is ongoing and forms a key part of our stakeholder engagement on Brexit and will continue through the negotiation process. The outcomes of the recent plenary session will again feed into the Government's approach.

As with previous dialogues, a full report of the third plenary session will be published online. It is anticipated that further sectoral dialogues will be held over the coming months. I also hope to convene a further plenary session in the near future.

Passport Controls

186. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Irish and-or EU legislation which requires Irish citizens to input their passport information into the website of their chosen airline before they depart the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42524/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Passports are internationally recognised travel documents which attest to the identity and nationality of the bearer.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for the issuance of passports to Irish citizens and for the maintenance of the security and integrity of the Irish passport.

However immigration or administrative requirements for entry into third States are not a matter within the competence of the Passport Service.

Passport Applications Fees

187. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to subsidise or make a grant available to persons over 70 years of age applying for passports in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42688/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade does not provide grants or subsidies to any particular category of applicant for a passport.

The cost of the standard ten year (adult) Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At a cost of €80, which breaks down to €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €8.30 per year for a British passport, €8.60 per year for a French passport, €9.40 per year for an American passport and €18.50 per year for an Australian passport. I do not have any plans at this time to reduce the fee for a passport or to award grants in connection with passport applications.

Ministerial Functions

188. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation

was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42781/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are two Ministers of State at my Department, Ciarán Cannon T.D. and Helen McEntee, T.D. Minister Cannon was appointed Minister of State with special responsibility for the Diaspora and International Development at my Department on 15 June 2017. Minister McEntee was appointed Minister of State with special responsibility for European Affairs at my Department on 20 June 2017.

The Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 1977 provides for the delegation of statutory Ministerial powers and duties to Ministers of State. This may be done at the request of the Minister concerned, by Government Order. My statutory powers as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade relate to consular, passport and other technical matters and it is not the practice, nor is it considered necessary, to delegate these functions.

Foreign Conflicts

189. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise with the Spanish government the recent and concerning actions of that government in Catalonia (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42209/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Concerns have been raised in the Oireachtas on a number of occasions in recent weeks, including when the Taoiseach spoke last week of his dismay and that of all of Government at the violence that took place on 1 October.

The Government's concern about the situation has been conveyed to the Spanish authorities by Minister of State Helen McEntee at a meeting with the Spanish Ambassador last week and by our Embassy in Madrid. The Embassy is also keeping its travel advice under review and is updating it on a regular basis to reflect developments.

Over the past week we have seen large scale demonstrations in Barcelona on 4 October, and over the past weekend in Madrid, Barcelona and a number of other locations across Spain. Spanish citizens have taken these opportunities to express a range of views on Catalonia.

Ireland respects the constitution and territorial unity of Spain. It remains the Government's view that it is for Spanish citizens to determine for themselves their preferred constitutional and political arrangements through their own democratic institutions and within the law. Upholding the constitution and the rule of law in all its aspects is a key underpinning of a modern democracy.

Political developments in democracies take place within a legal framework. This is what protects the rights of all of our citizens. Respecting the rule of law and the limits that it imposes is not a choice but an obligation. Differences of opinion should be contested robustly by public representatives and others, and all parties should do so with full respect for the law and the rights of citizens. This is the foundation that underpins and protects modern, democratic societies.

The situation in Catalonia will continue to be closely monitored by the Government.

Lobbying Data

190. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42292/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Neither my predecessor as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan, nor I have held any meetings specifically on the subject of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill during the period in question.

However, the broader issue of alcohol policy was raised with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in the context of two meetings since March 2016 regarding the UK's departure from the EU. At both meetings, there was no substantive discussion on alcohol policy and the exchanges remained focused on Brexit.

The first occasion on which alcohol policy was raised was at a meeting regarding Brexit between Minister Flanagan and representatives of Diageo (Oliver Loomes, Dan Mobley, Liam Reid) on 5 October 2016. The second occasion was a meeting I held regarding Brexit with the Food and Drink Ireland group (IBEC) on 26 September 2017. Those in attendance from Food and Drink Ireland were Colin Gordon, Maurice Hickey, Oliver Loomes, Jim Woulfe, Philip Tallon, Philip Carroll, Patricia Callan, Paul Kelly, Kevin McPartlan, Conor Mulvihill and Joe Ryan.

Human Rights

191. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he has discussed the case with his Filipino counterpart recently. [42325/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is continuing to do everything it can to support and assist this citizen. However, what the Irish Government can do in the case of an Irish citizen who is involved in a criminal case overseas is limited. The Irish Government cannot intervene in a matter that is before the courts in another jurisdiction, just as no foreign government can interfere in our judicial system.

Nonetheless, both I and my officials have been working very hard on this citizen's behalf. We have made repeated representations to the authorities in Manila stressing the humanitarian concerns in this case and requesting that the pending appeal against this man's conviction be expedited.

The Irish Government made a direct request to the Administrator of the Supreme Court to ask that this Appeal be expedited on humanitarian grounds. In April of this year, the Administrator of the Supreme Court acknowledged the Irish Government's concerns and interests in the matter and instructed that the papers related to the Appeal should be elevated to the Supreme Court for consideration.

In July 2017 attorneys acting on behalf of this citizen advised that all relevant papers had been filed in relation to the appeal. The matter is now with the Supreme Court for resolution.

Last month while I was attending the UN General Assembly session in New York I personally raised the case directly with the Philippines Foreign Minister, Mr Alan Cayetano. I underlined the Irish Government's concerns about this situation and asked for Foreign Minister Cay-

etano's assistance, specifically in relation to our request that the Supreme Court consider the appeal urgently. Minister Cayetano agreed to follow up on the matter on his return to Manila.

The Irish Ambassador to The Philippines has also, on my instruction, raised the case again at senior official level in recent weeks with the Philippines Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Paternity Leave

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on allowing paternity leave to be taken within the first year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42678/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will be aware, the Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 creates a statutory entitlement to two weeks' paternity leave and benefit, which can be taken at any point within 26 weeks of the date of the baby's birth (or in the case of adoption, within 26 weeks of the day of placement).

Parents want choice and flexibility, and the provisions contained in the Paternity Leave and Benefit Act give them a considerable degree of flexibility by allowing to choose when they take the time off to care for their child, within a six month time frame.

The Deputy will also be aware of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to increase, over the course of the next five years, paid statutory leave afforded to parents during the first year of a child's life. My intention is to publish my proposals in that regard in due course for inclusion in the Family Leave Bill. The Bill will also review all existing family leave legislation such as parental leave, carer's leave, maternity leave, and adoptive leave and consolidate this legislation into one Act.

Parental Leave

193. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to amend the parental leave legislation to extend the age limit in order to allow parental leave be taken up to the age that a child finishes their primary education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42718/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will be aware, under the Parental Leave Act 1998, as amended by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006, an entitlement was created for parents to 14 weeks unpaid parental leave on the birth or adoption of a child. Such leave was to be taken until the child had reached the age of eight years with certain extensions allowed in the case of adoptees and children with a disability or long-term illness.

On 8 March 2013 the European Union (Parental Leave) Regulations 2013 increased the amount of parental leave available to each parent per child from 14 weeks to 18 weeks. The Regulations also extended the age limit for a child with a disability or long-term illness to 16 years.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the Government has approved drafting of a Family Leave Bill, which I intend to publish in early course. The Bill will consolidate all existing family leave legislation such as parental leave, carer's leave, maternity leave and adoptive leave into one Act while making necessary amendments and improvements.

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

194. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when essential remedial work is to commence on Ballinamore courthouse, County Leitrim, which is in a dilapidated condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42876/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that work was due to be undertaken earlier this year on the roof of Ballinamore courthouse. The Courts Service has further informed me that the Office of Public Works advised that a report on the structure of the building is required before any work could commence. The Courts Service is currently awaiting a structural engineer's report on the building which will inform the refurbishment process.

Garda Complaints Procedures

195. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the follow up that is being planned further to the meeting with persons (details supplied) regarding the tragic death of their son. [42992/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As I have previously explained to the Deputy, this tragic case was considered under the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and the recommendation was that no further action should be taken. Counsel for the IRM pointed out that the appropriate forum for raising matters related to alleged Garda failings was the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) who were already investigating certain matters arising from the tragic death in this case.

GSOC is an independent body tasked with the investigation of complaints against members of the Garda Síochána. That independence is crucial to confidence in the process of investigating such complaints. Therefore, it is a matter entirely for GSOC as to how it carries out its investigations and it would be entirely inappropriate for me, as Minister, to comment on any current GSOC investigation.

I am aware that GSOC met with members of the family in question recently and my understanding is they were given a full update on the current position with regard to the investigation of their complaints.

In the circumstances, I can only say that I await the outcome of the GSOC investigation. When that outcome is known, the question of whether, and if so, what further action can be taken, will be considered.

Property Services Regulatory Authority

196. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to amend legislation, secondary or primary, to tighten up regulation of companies which offer foreign property investment opportunities to ordinary investors in view of numerous instances of such companies retaining deposits on properties that are never built. [43002/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) was established on 3 April 2012 pursuant to the provisions of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011. The PSRA is mandated to control, supervise and regulate Property Service Providers (PSPs), i.e. auctioneers/estate agents, letting agents and management agents. The PSRA, which is independent in the performance of its statutory functions, operates a comprehensive licensing system in respect of all PSPs, administers a system of investigation and adjudication of complaints against PSPs, and maintains a sector funded compensation fund where licensed PSPs have acted dishonestly.

The provision of property services by a licensed PSP or a relevant person (as provided for under Section 82 of the 2011 Act, i.e. property service providers from other EU countries), includes the auction of property other than land, the purchase or sale, by whatever means of land (including property), the letting of land and/or property management services in respect of property both within and outside the State. The purchase or sale of overseas properties by licensed PSPs is a property service for the purposes of the Act if the service is provided in the State.

Section 65 of the 2011 Act provides for the PSRA to investigate complaints made against licensed PSPs. Following an investigation where a licensed PSP is found to be negligent in retaining a booking deposit, a sanction may be imposed and or a claim against the PSP's professional indemnity insurance may be made. However, where an act of dishonesty is established against a licensed PSP, the client may make a claim on the Property Services Compensation Fund.

I am advised by the Authority that this is not an issue which has been brought to its attention to date. Accordingly, there are no specific plans at this time for legislative change to the property services regulatory regime to address this specific matter. However, it may be the case that other Irish regulatory bodies may have a more direct responsibility in this regard, for example, the Central Bank, as the regulator of investment companies.

Garda Stations

197. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will publish the terms of reference for the interim reports and final report regarding the reopening of six Garda stations on a pilot basis; the length of time the stations will be reopened as part of the pilot scheme; if other considerations will be given in determining if a pilot station will remain open on a full time basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42470/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The report to which the Deputy refers was published on 30 September 2017, along with a letter from the Tánaiste and then Minister for Justice and Equality to the Garda Commissioner. I understand that the final report is due to be completed in the coming weeks and the Government will consider the matter in due course.

Garda Deployment

198. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed at Clondalkin, Lucan, Ronanstown and Rathcoole; the comparable figures for each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42500/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that the allocation of Gardaí is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda human resources.

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

As the Deputy will be aware Clondalkin, Lucan, Ronanstown and Rathcoole Garda Stations form part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) West Garda Division. I am informed that on the 31 August 2017 the total strength of the DMR West Garda Division was 664. There are also 27 Garda Reserves and 47 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of the Division is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is progressing well. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am pleased to announce today that I have secured sufficient funding to provide for the recruitment of another 800 new Garda recruits in 2018, which will ensure that the planned Garda strength of 15,000 by 2021 remains on course to be achieved. Budget 2018 will also facilitate the recruitment of a further 500 civilians and the strengthening of the Reserve.

I am advised by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of which 119 were assigned to the DMR West Division, 17 of which were assigned following last September's attestation. I understand that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the DMR West Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million

for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

I am informed by the Commissioner that as of the 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, the Garda strength of Clondalkin, Lucan, Ronanstown and Rathcoole Garda Stations from 2012 up to 2017 are as set out in the tables below.

Garda Strength by Station 2012 - 2017

Station	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*
Clondalkin	95	91	89	87	94	99
Lucan	73	72	74	73	74	69
Ronanstown	93	91	91	94	91	93
Rathcoole	26	23	23	21	19	15

*Up to 31 August 2017

Immigrant Investor Programme Administration

199. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a project (details supplied) was referred to the immigrant investor programme committee; if so, the reason it was not successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42503/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that enquiries were made to officials in the Immigrant Investor Programme Unit in relation to the project referred to by the Deputy. However, the project was not submitted to the Evaluation Committee based on the advices given.

Immigrant Investor Programme Administration

200. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the due diligence that is carried out on companies submitting projects to the immigrant investor programme; if an assessment was made of a company (details supplied) that has submitted projects; if tax clearance and other checks are carried out on companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42504/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the purpose of the Immigrant Investor programme is to incentivise investment in Ireland by high net worth non-EEA nationals. As part of the investment, the non-national receives a specific immigration permission. There is no contractual relationship between my Department and individual developers or agents, such as the company referred to by the Deputy. In that context, a requirement to demand a tax clearance certificate or other form of certificate from such companies does not arise. It is the investor who is entering into a relationship with the company in question and he or she would be prudent to do due diligence before committing a sum of €1 million to a project.

All projects being proposed for consideration as applicable projects are, however, required to submit a detailed business plan with all relevant supporting documentation and where the agent is a developer or project proposer then all statutory requirements and regulations must be supported with appropriate documents.

Immigrant Investor Programme Administration

201. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the representations made by Members of the Government for projects submitted under the immigrant investor programme in each of the past three years; if he will release the representations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42505/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that no representations by members of the Government in support of projects submitted under the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) have been received in each of the past 3 years.

Refugee Status Applications

202. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Government will give consideration to granting refugee status to persons fleeing the ongoing persecution within Venezuela; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42523/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. As such, Ireland is bound by international law to provide international protection to refugees and it is an obligation taken very seriously by Government.

In the International Protection Act 2015, a refugee is defined as ‘a person...who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it’.

Applications for International Protection in Ireland are processed by the International Protection Office (IPO). The Chief International Protection Officer and the International Protection Officers of the Office are independent by law in the exercise of their international protection functions.

All applicants for international protection, including those made by Venezuelan nationals in Ireland, are carefully interviewed and their cases are individually assessed by trained caseworkers. The circumstances of each individual case is assessed having regard to both the subjective elements (the applicant’s own account or personal history) and objective elements (up-to-date information on the applicant’s country or place of origin). Supporting documentation submitted by applicants is also taken into account.

Garda Reserve

203. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress which has been made in recruiting Garda reserves in view of the fact that funding has been provided to recruit 300 Garda reserves in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42538/17]

204. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress which has been made in recruiting Garda recruits in view of the fact that funding has been provided to recruit 800 Garda recruits in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42539/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 by 2021 will require some 2,400 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next three years in addition to the 2,000 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014.

The workforce plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014 that close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016. In addition to this, a further 800 Garda trainees are expected to attest in 2018.

I am pleased to announce today that I have secured sufficient funding to provide for the recruitment of another 800 new Garda recruits in 2018, which will ensure that the planned Garda strength of 15,000 by 2021 remains on course.

In relation to the Garda Reserve, which has significant potential to be a visible presence on the ground engaging with local communities funding has been provided for the recruitment of 300 new Reserves this year. That process is well underway with the Public Appointments Service undertaking the selection process on behalf of the Commissioner. It is expected that successful candidates from will enter training early in the New Year. I am also pleased that Budget 2018 will facilitate the continued strengthening of the Reserve next year.

Probation and Welfare Service

205. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the modernisation of the probate system having previously stated that a report with recommendations for the modernisation of same was due by mid 2017 to be presented to the senior management team of the Courts Service and to the Courts Service Board for their consideration; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that delays within the current probate system are causing undue hardship on many persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42575/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in 14 provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that backlogs in the probate system are a cause for concern and that if an issue of hardship is brought to the attention of the Probate Office or a District Probate Registry, a Grant of Representation is expedited.

The main reason for requests to expedite the issue of a Grant in a deceased person's estate is to facilitate the sale of property, and where requests for such expedites arise, the Grant issues promptly. In the Probate Office in Dublin it usually issues within a 2 to 3 week timeframe in Solicitors' applications, while Personal Applicants are seen by appointment as soon as possible and the Grant issues within 3 to 4 days of their appointment with the Probate Office.

The Courts Service has advised that the review of the probate system is ongoing and that it is anticipated that a report will be completed before the end of 2017 for presentation to the senior management team of the Courts Service and to the Courts Service Board.

Garda Deployment

206. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason An Garda Síochána is advertising internally for one sergeant and two gardaí for the penalty point office; if the policy of placing gardaí on policing duty and away from administration has changed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42594/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the arranging of competitions at the ranks of Garda, Sergeant and Inspector, and I as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

As part of its Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána, the Government has agreed an overall vision for a Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 to include 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. This very substantial investment in personnel is driven by our commitment to ensure all citizens have the reassurance of a visible, responsive and effective policing service. The projected number of 4,000 civilians will effectively double the current figure and represents a medium-term target of a Garda organisation 20% comprised of civilians. That will bring An Garda Síochána, currently 14% comprised of civilians, more in line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff.

The 20% target will be achieved through a twin-track approach of, firstly, a "civilian by default" policy to be adopted in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant and, secondly, the redeployment of Gardaí and backfilling by suitably qualified civilians where necessary. In its 'Changing Policing in Ireland' report, the Garda Inspectorate has estimated that there may be up to 1,250 Gardaí currently in such posts and the Government's plan aims to return as many of these Gardaí as possible to front-line duties over the next five years. Work is in train on the development of redeployment plan and the first batch of 43 Gardaí to be redeployed have been identified with a further 120 in the process of being identified.

Funding for the recruitment of up to 500 civilians was provided in Budget 2017 to facilitate the Commissioner in addressing capacity and critical skills gaps across the organisation including in corporate supports, change management, human resources and financial management at the national, regional and Divisional level. These appointments are intended to facilitate deeper civilianisation in the coming years. In addition, I am pleased to announce that Budget 2018 will facilitate the recruitment of an additional 500 civilians next year to continue to support the civilianisation agenda.

I have requested a report from the Commissioner in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy and I will revert to the him when it is to hand.

Prisoner Transfers

207. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the prisoner transfer scheme following the Supreme Court judgment in the Rafferty et al v Governor of Portlaoise case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42608/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 12 July, 2016, the Supreme Court dismissed the State's appeal in the case known as 'O'Farrell, McDonald, Rafferty -v- The Governor of Portlaoise Prison'. The case concerns an appeal taken by the State against a judgement of the High Court ordering the release of the three named prisoners who had been transferred to Ireland from the UK where they had been sentenced, under the provisions of the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners Acts, 1995 -1997.

The judgement is detailed and has implications for the continuance in its present form of the process operated by the Irish Prison Service for transferring prisoners from other States to Ireland. The practical effect of this judgement and whether it will necessitate legislative and/or administrative changes is being examined by officials of the Irish Prison Service and my Department in consultation with Attorney General. Given the complex nature of the review being undertaken, it is not possible at this stage to indicate a time frame for its conclusion.

Commencement of Legislation

208. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a commencement order will be signed to commence the operation of Part 12 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42611/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under Part 12 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 there is to be a new Advisory Committee on the Grant of Patents of Precedence that will be established by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority. As well as receiving and considering relevant applications, the Committee will recommend legal practitioners, that is to say solicitors or barristers, it considers suitable to use the title of Senior Counsel to the Government by way of their being granted a Patent of Precedence. The Committee will also establish the criteria to be met by legal practitioners in order for such a recommendation to be made. These will be based on a number of objectives specified in section 173(2) of the 2015 Act including that the legal practitioner concerned will, in his or her practice, have displayed a degree of competence and a degree of probity appropriate to and consistent with the granting of a Patent of Precedence along with professional independence. These objectives also include a proven capacity for excellence in the practice of advocacy; in the practice of specialist litigation; or in specialist knowledge of an area of law. The Advisory Committee framework will, therefore, replace the current procedures in this area while also placing them on a more formal and transparent footing.

The Advisory Committee, which can also recommend the revocation of a Patent of Precedence, will be chaired by the Chief Justice and will also comprise the President of the High Court; the Attorney General; the Chairperson of the Bar Council; the President of the Law Society and a lay member of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority who will be nominated by the Minister for Justice and Equality. I will also be bringing forward an amendment to the 2015 Act to include, as a member, the President of the Court of Appeal whose coming into office had

not been anticipated at the time of publication of the Legal Services Regulation Bill in 2011.

The establishment of the Advisory Committee on the Grant of Patents of Precedence is both a key reform and a key component of the managed and phased roll-out of its legislative functions by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority including in the matching development of its organisational capacities and office and staffing resources. This will, in addition to the amendment to which I have referred, involve the detailed preparation by the Regulatory Authority of the procedures and application criteria for the consideration and recommendation of candidates for the title of Senior Counsel and the inauguration of the Advisory Committee. In respecting the Authority's independence in the roll-out and exercise of its statutory functions, 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, including those which arise under Part 12, 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 support of which I will make the relevant Commencement Orders at the appropriate time.

Courts Service Administration

209. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if steps can be taken to alleviate the pressure on District Courts that are hearing contested family law matters late into the evening; if plans are in place to improve the determination of family law disputes before courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42615/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. Furthermore, the scheduling of court cases and the allocation of court business is a matter the President of the District Court and the presiding judge who are, under the constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the President of the District Court monitors waiting times and workload across all court lists and seeks to ensure the optimum use of court time and judicial resources. Wherever possible, the President targets additional judicial resources at the areas of greatest need.

I am also informed that delays in the hearing of cases and the size of court lists can be impacted by a number of factors, many of which are outside the control of the courts and the Courts Service, for example, the unavailability of a witness or vital evidence, delays in the furnishing of reports or because the parties and/or legal practitioners are not ready to proceed on allocated dates. This gives rise to adjournments, which can have a major impact on the time taken to complete the hearing of a case and on the number of cases which are listed in a court sitting.

Domestic violence applications are prioritised in all District Courts throughout the country. Applications such as Protection Orders are prioritised in the District Court and they are usually granted where the Court so decides on the date the application is made to the Court. Typically interim barring orders, which are also an emergency application, are also made ex parte and granted on the date of application. There are, therefore, no delays in dealing with such applications.

In provincial locations Barring Order applications are generally listed for the next dedicated family law day (most Districts have at least 1 day per month dedicated to family law only). This means that such cases are generally listed for hearing between 2 - 6 weeks from the issue date. There are exceptions, however, and in some instances the first listing for the hearing of a barring order summons may be up to 14 weeks. Applications for Barring Orders are prioritised within court lists and a decision is generally made on such applications on the first listing date. Where adjournments occur they are generally granted at the request of one or both parties.

The President of the District Court as well as the Courts Service will continue to monitor the position in regard to waiting times and the length of court lists and where possible appropriate consideration will be given to allocating additional judicial resources to address any issues that may arise.

The 2011-2016 Programme for Government contained a commitment to establish a “*distinct and separate system of family courts to streamline family law court processes and make them more efficient and less costly*” and draft legislation is in preparation to give effect to this commitment.

A working group comprised of the Department, the Courts Service and the Legal Aid Board is currently in place to examine, among other things, how the new Family Court would operate on the ground and what are the implications for family law cases.

Courts Service Remit

210. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has engaged with the Courts Service regarding affording greater involvement to wards of courts and their families with the wards of courts funds and the funds of minors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42630/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that when a person is taken into wardship, the President of the High Court appoints a committee, usually a relative (or relatives) of the ward, to deal with the ward's property and it is the responsibility of the President of the High Court to ensure that the estate of the ward is protected. It is standard procedure for funds of the ward to be brought under the custody of the court for investment by the Accountant of the Courts of Justice in accordance with the directions of the President of the High Court and the Registrar of the Office of Wards of Court. Investment of court funds is carried out in line with the strategies devised and reviewed on a regular basis by the Investment Committee, chaired by the President of the High Court.

The Investment Committee reviews the investment strategies with the assistance of its investment advisors to ensure the protection and suitable investment of funds of wards, minors and others lodged in court for the benefit of those persons. Investment policies and orders made thereunder must be in accordance with the Trustee (Authorised Investments) Act 1958. This procedure was examined and approved by the court in the case entitled “In the Matter of M. H., a Ward of Court” [2011] IEHC 129.

The Courts Service has also informed me that the committee of the ward is involved with the Office of Wards of Court on an ongoing basis in establishing the expenditure needs of a

ward. A case officer is appointed to manage the affairs of each ward who is available to meet with the committee initially to discuss the needs and financial arrangements for the ward and is available thereafter as required. Significant purchases or sales such as the sale of a house or lands will not take place without the involvement of the committee.

The Courts Service has advised that detailed statements providing comprehensive financial information are issued to committees on request and a process of issuing high level financial statements to all committees has now commenced and that such statements will issue automatically on an annual basis.

As the Deputy may be aware, the legislation governing persons who are wards of court dates back to 1871. It has been recognised for some time that reforms were needed to update the law in this area and so the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 has been introduced to provide a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties.

New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health), must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act are brought into operation. A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service and this work is ongoing.

Garda Stations

211. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the location of all non-operational Garda stations in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42642/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of Garda resources in the State and, as Minister, I have no role in relation to these matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Síochána District and Station Rationalisation Programme gave rise to the closure of some 139 Garda stations in 2012 and 2013, including Garda stations in Tipperary, following the completion by An Garda Síochána of a comprehensive review of its district and station network.

I understand that the review was undertaken with the objective of identifying opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation.

I am informed that the following stations in the Tipperary Division were closed under the Programme.

District	Station
Thurles	Ballinure
Nenagh	Ballinderry
Nenagh	Terryglass
Nenagh	Rearcross
Cahir	New Inn

District	Station
Clonmel	Grangemockler
Tipperary Town	Dundrum

While seven Garda stations were closed, there are currently 29 Garda stations in the Tipperary Division including a major divisional headquarters in Thurles. There are currently 373 Gardaí assigned to Co. Tipperary and Garda recruitment is continuing apace. I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the closures have allowed front line Gardaí to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to targeted police operations.

The Programme for Government commits to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. A cornerstone of this commitment is the Government plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

In addition, the Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides for an unprecedented level of investment in An Garda Síochána over the lifetime of the Plan, including:

- €46 million for investment in the Garda Fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015;

- Some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, for investment in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021. This major investment will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime and will facilitate progress on important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation;

- The Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021, which is an ambitious 5 year Programme that will benefit over thirty locations around the country and provides for over €60million of Exchequer funding as part of Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 as well as a major Public Private Partnership project which will include the construction of a new Garda station in Clonmel. This is in addition to over €100 million being invested in 3 major Garda Headquarters in Dublin, Galway and Wexford.

Garda Vetting

212. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of compliance officers employed by the national vetting unit; when they were appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42643/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 provides for a range of offences and sanctions for non-compliance with the Act. In addition, the Act provides for the assigning of compliance officers with the specific powers to enter and inspect premises to ensure compliance.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that at present all compliance issues are dealt with by the Disputes and Compliance Section of the Bureau. To date, the office has received notification of a small number of compliance requests and have acted on each issue.

The National Vetting Bureau has adopted best practice in relation to the management of compliance through a three tiered approach of support, self assessment, and investigation and compliance.

Pending the deadline for retrospective vetting of the 31 December 2017, the focus of the Bureau at present is on providing information to organisations as to their requirements to be vetted and supporting organisations to comply with the requirements of the Act. In this regard, the Bureau has conducted a number of presentations to a wide range of organisations nationwide. It is the intention of the Bureau to proceed with this supportive focus in line with the flexibilities and exemptions in the Act.

The Bureau is currently finalising a self-assessment compliance template for completion by all organisations. This approach was outlined and discussed with organisations at seminars in the second quarter of 2017 and all organisations registered with the National Vetting Bureau will be required to complete the self assessment by the end of December 2017.

Following this bedding-in period, the Bureau will appoint compliance officers, in line with human resource management policy and a schedule of planned audits for organisations will be undertaken throughout 2018.

Departmental Reviews

213. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 172 of 16 September 2016, the progress to date on the Murray review of the law on surveillance of journalists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42693/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 3 October 2017 I published the report of Mr. Justice John L. Murray's Review of the Law on Retention of and Access to Communications Data. The report is available on my Department's website. While the Review was initially commissioned to look at issues concerning access by statutory bodies to communications data of journalists held by communications service providers, Mr. Justice Murray also undertook a very detailed analysis of the law in this area including recent and significant judgments of the European Court of Justice.

I thank Mr. Justice Murray for his work on the review which, I would note, he carried out pro bono. His report provides very valuable advice in this complex and dynamic area of the law.

On 3 October I also published the general scheme of a Communications (Retention of Data) Bill. This proposed new legislation responds to recent judgments of the European Court of Justice and will update the current law in Ireland. In particular I am proposing prior judicial authorisation in all cases where the state seeks access to meta data in the context of investigations.

I have written to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality to ask it to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of the general scheme of the Communications (Retention of Data) Bill and I have also forwarded Mr. Justice Murray's report to the Committee in this context.

Garda Deployment

214. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for restoring Garda numbers in the Glencolumbkille and Carrick Garda districts, which

currently stand at one when previously four gardaí were stationed in those areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42722/17]

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

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is progressing apace. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

The areas mentioned by the Deputy are located in the Ballyshannon Garda District which forms part of the Donegal Division. I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Donegal Division, on 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 392, of whom 91 members are assigned to the Ballyshannon District. There are also 19 Garda Reserves and 32 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 24 of whom have been assigned to the Donegal Division. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased to announce today that I have secured sufficient funding to provide for the recruitment of another 800 new Garda recruits in 2018, which will ensure that the planned Garda strength of 15,000 by 2021 remains on course.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Donegal Division in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

Ministerial Responsibilities

215. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there were changes in the powers delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42784/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In accordance with the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No.2) Act 1977, the Government may delegate, by way of an Order, to a Minister of State any of the powers and duties of the relevant Minister of the Government under any particular Act or any particular statutory power or duty. Such orders can be made in cases where a Minister of State would be expected to carry out statutory functions on behalf of or in addition to a Minister. However, the role and functions of Ministers of State of course often encompass broad areas of responsibility rather than being limited to those powers formally delegated under statute.

As you will appreciate the Department of Justice and Equality has a broad remit and I welcome the support provided by various colleagues who have been assigned to my Department as Ministers of State.

Earlier this year, Mr. David Stanton TD was reappointed Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration. In July 2017, I received Government approval to delegate powers and duties to Minister of State Stanton TD. These powers and duties are set out in Statutory Instrument 351 of 2017. Minister Stanton's responsibilities include human rights and equality, matters relating to the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, reception and integration matters, various EU funding matters, and matters relating to youth justice, gambling and firearms that fall under the responsibility of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Statutory Instrument 351 differs from the prior Delegation of Functions Order, S.I. No 422 of 2016, by the addition in the Schedule of the Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 (No. 11 of 2016).

Mr. Finian McGrath TD also remains Minister of State attending Government and Minister of State at the Departments of Social Protection, Justice & Equality and Health with special responsibility for Disabilities. The Office of Minister of State McGrath is located in the Department of Health. I understand that certain statutory functions have been delegated to Minister McGrath by both the Minister for Health and the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Mr. Pat Breen TD was appointed Minister of State at the then named Department of Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Employment and Social Protection, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection in June 2017, having served as Minister of State for Employment and Small Business from May 2016. His Office is located in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Minister Breen's responsibility within my Department is in respect of Data Protection matters. However, I will continue to lead on the legislative passage of the Data Protection Bill.

Alcohol Sales Legislation

216. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to recent

legislation passed which provides for craft brewers licenced to sell their products to brewery visitors between certain times, if the licence is a saleable asset; if it is transferable; if they can be converted to full licences in time; if the licence will expire if a business closes down; the way in which it is proposed to police the operating hours which apply to the licence; the way in which it is proposed to police limiting the sale of products manufactured on the premises as the only alcohol products sold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42819/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that the Intoxicating Liquor (Breweries and Distilleries) Bill 2016 is a Private Members Bill tabled by Deputy Alan Kelly. The Bill completed Second Stage in the Dáil on the 26 July and is currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Justice and Equality Committee.

I intend to table a series of amendments to the Bill at Committee Stage. As already indicated during Second Stage discussions, the general purpose of these amendments will be to ensure that the rules normally applicable to the grant of retail licences, including the requirement to obtain an appropriate court certificate, will also apply to licences granted under this Bill. It is intended that such a licence would permit sales of intoxicating liquor produced on the premises only to those who have participated in a tour of the premises.

Prison Service

217. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the process by which the Prison Service is offering six month contracts to retired former personnel under 60 years of age is cost effective or counter productive to the process of hiring of new recruits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42875/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service's recruitment of retired Prison Officers on short term contracts is a short term measure pending the sufficient recruitment of permanent Prison Officers. Recruitment of permanent Prison Officers is on-going with approximately 87 new Recruit Prison Officers this year and a further 288 Recruit Prison Officers in 2018.

Garda Stations

218. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to provide a garda station in Glencolumbkille (details supplied); his further plans to locate a garda station in another community owned building within the village of Glencolumbkille; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42930/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána.

Glenn Cholm Cille was among a number of stations closed around the country in recent years because of the emphasis on ensuring front line Gardaí could be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion particularly with regard to various targeted police operations.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government's focus is on increasing Garda numbers and ensuring that Gardaí are appropriately resourced to protect and serve the community. In this context, among the range of justice measures announced in today's Budget, the Government

committed to recruiting 800 additional Gardaí in 2018 and investing €6 million in new Garda vehicles in 2018.

Data Protection Commissioner

219. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding arrangements for the office of the Data Protection Commissioner with regard to the Commissioner's plans to increase staff and resources at a location in Dublin; the timeframe to increase staff and resources; the number of additional staff being employed in the Dublin region; his plans for 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42983/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Government has publicly committed to continuing to provide the resources necessary for the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) to perform its globally significant role, which will become increasingly prominent under the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

This commitment was reflected in the ODPC's very significantly increased budget provision of €7.256m for 2017, up almost 60 per cent on its allocation of €4.748m for 2016 and four times its budget for 2014. The ODPC's budget allocation for 2018 has been considered in the context of the 2018 Estimates process and further details will be available as part of Budget day Estimates.

The combined staff number for the ODPC's Dublin and Portarlington offices currently stands at 70 and is expected to reach 90 by the end of 2017. It is anticipated that staffing numbers will increase by a further 50 per cent to a total of 135 staff during 2018. Allocation of staff between its Dublin and Portarlington offices will be made on a business needs basis.

Departmental Schemes

220. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application under a scheme (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42985/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems and, in this context, a new Community-based CCTV grant-aid Scheme was launched by my Department in April 2017 to assist community groups in the establishment of CCTV systems in their local areas.

Under the Scheme, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000. Upon approval of the grant, the applicant will receive an up-front payment of 50% of the grant with the balance to be paid when the system is fully operational. Some €1 million was secured in Budget 2017 for the purposes of the Scheme and it is envisaged that a similar amount will be made available in 2018 and 2019.

Full details of the Scheme, including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie.

I would draw attention, in particular, to some of the key requirements of the Scheme which

require that the proposal must -

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,

- have the prior support of the relevant Local Authority, which must also act as Data Controller – this is a long-standing statutory requirement, set out in the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 289 of 2006), for the establishment of community CCTV systems generally, and

- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner in accordance with Section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

The Scheme is modelled closely on the previous grant-aid Scheme operated by Pobal on behalf of my Department between 2005 and 2013 under which some 45 Community-based CCTV systems were established operating in a mix of urban and rural environments.

With regard to the application referred to by the Deputy, I understand that a number of the mandatory requirements for funding were not satisfied and, accordingly, the application was returned to the applicant to enable these requirements to be met.

The information supplied by the Deputy would appear to indicate that the applicant is of the view that there must be a local authority office and a Garda station in the location where the proposed CCTV system is to be established. I can assure the Deputy that this is not a requirement of the Scheme. I would again refer the Deputy to the documentation on my Department's website which provides a clear elaboration of the requirements for funding under the Scheme.

I am very keen to ensure that groups take full advantage of the available funding and I would strongly encourage interested groups to utilise the Scheme. Guidance is available from my officials to provide any clarifications required in relation to the Scheme.

Garda Deployment

221. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí in each Garda division, in tabular form. [42218/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Deployment

222. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to increase Garda numbers in the Cavan and Monaghan division in view of the reduction in garda personnel since 2010; if the particular policing needs of this division due to a long land border with a neighbouring jurisdiction will be taken into account in the allocation of garda resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42257/17]

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

use is made of these resources.

I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Cavan / Monaghan Division on the 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 323 with 12 Garda Reserves and 37 Civilians. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is progressing apace. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am further informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 33 of whom have been assigned to the Cavan / Monaghan Division. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Cavan / Monaghan Division in the coming years.

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

Lobbying Data

223. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42295/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Since taking up office as Minister for Justice and Equality, I have been lobbied by organisations registered on the Register of Lobbyists under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 in respect of the Public Health

(Alcohol) Bill on two occasions. One organisation expressed support for the Bill while the other raised concerns in relation to the structural separation requirements in the Bill. I forwarded both representations to the Minister for Health.

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is in the Programme for a Partnership Government and its enactment is a priority for Government.

Naturalisation Applications

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a stamp 4 application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42305/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy arrived in the State on 11 September 2006, and that their most recent permission to remain in the State, on the basis of a change of immigration status following their separation from their Irish National spouse, expired on 27 June 2017.

I understand that INIS have no current application for this person. As the person concerned does not have current permission to remain in the State, INIS advise that the person concerned is required to apply, in writing, to INIS for renewal of permission. An application should be forwarded to:

Spouse of Irish National Unit

Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS)

PO Box 12695

Dublin 2

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.

Probate Applications

225. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases of probate sales in the system; the expected waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42310/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in 14 provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the

Courts Service has informed me that a Grant of Representation in a deceased person's estate may be required for a variety of reasons and statistics as to why a Grant must issue are not maintained in the Probate Office/Registries. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the number of cases of probate sales as sought by the Deputy. The Courts Service has advised further that when the Probate Office/Registries are notified that there is a sale of property pending in an estate, this Grant is always expedited. In the Probate Office in Dublin it usually issues within a 2 to 3 week timeframe in Solicitors' applications, while Personal Applicants are seen by appointment as soon as possible and the Grant issues within 3 to 4 days of their appointment with the Probate Office.

Garda Stations

226. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delay in publishing the interim report on the reopening of Garda stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42363/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that I published the interim report concerned on 30 September 2017.

While, in the normal course, it would be appropriate and usual to await the completion of the final report and its consideration by Government, in the light of misleading public comment and baseless assertions being made I concluded that it would be in the public interest to make the interim report available.

I am of the view, in all the circumstances, that the public interest was best served by the publication of the interim report and that there was no question of any "delay" in relation to its publication.

Garda Reserve

227. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the percentage of Garda reserves completing a minimum of 208 annual hours per annum duty obligations; the number of times on average reserves are requested to assist policing in district; the annual cost of Garda reserves; the percentage of reserves formally allocated a duty in the formal duty register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42364/17]

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

The Garda Reserve was established in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to enhance the links between An Garda Síochána and local communities and consists of voluntary unpaid members, drawn from the community, to support the work of An Garda Síochána. The Reserve perform policing duties as determined by the Commissioner, while accompanied by full time Gardaí. Their role is to provide local patrols and participate in crime prevention initiatives targeted at specific local problem areas. Reserve members are also involved in policing major incidents and events, and in providing other operational support to full time Gardaí. In recent years, the Commissioner has conferred further powers on reserve members under the

Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and the Road Traffic Act 1961 and has also decided that they should carry out more duties including the serving of summonses, and the issuing of Fixed Charge Penalty Notices where offences are detected.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel including Reserves, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division.

I am further informed that the information requested by the Deputy regarding Reserves assisting policing in a District and being allocated a duty in the duty register is not readily available in the format requested by the Deputy.

As the Deputy will be aware, service in the Garda Reserve is voluntary and unpaid. However, an allowance is payable to Reserve members who complete a minimum of 208 hours duty annually as a contribution towards expenses incurred in performing their duties. The allowance is currently set at €1,000 per annum. Reserves are also reimbursed for expenses incurred while attending court in respect of their service as a Reserve.

I am advised that during 2016, 303 Garda Reserves claimed the allowance which is equivalent to 44% of the Reserve strength of 695 as of 31 December 2016. The cost of the Reserve in 2016 was €341,125.

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

In conjunction with the major expansion of the Reserve over the next number of years we must ensure that it is used to optimum effect to support effective policing. To inform future decisions around the use of the Reserve An Garda Síochána is conducting a strategic review as a matter of priority with a view to completion before the end of this year. As a first step the Garda Executive has taken a decision to transfer the management of the Reserve from the Human Resource and People Development Directorate to the Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for Community Engagement. This is intended to ensure that its development and deployment is viewed more broadly through a community policing lens. This is a very welcome step as it is my strong view that the greatest dividend to be gained from the Reserve is in terms of a visible presence on the ground engaging with local communities.

Garda Deployment

228. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardai in each district in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42365/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Expenditure

229. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of fund-

ing allocated to each division in each of the past ten years for the purposes of establishing or supporting text alert, community alert or neighbourhood watch schemes, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42366/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will also be aware that as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders; for example, the well established Community Alert Programme and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme to name but a few.

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

Since the Community Text Alert scheme was launched in September 2013, it has developed as an important crime prevention mechanism with over 700 local groups involving in excess of 130,000 subscribers and with an estimated 200,000 text messages sent each month under the scheme. Every Garda Division, rural and urban, now offers the text alert service and An Garda Síochána has published guidelines to assist in the establishment and operation of local groups.

The Deputy might wish to note that funding from my Department is not used to provide direct assistance to Neighbourhood Watch Groups or any local Community Alert (or Text Alert) Groups.

In relation to Community Alert, funding is allocated by my Department for the employment and associated costs of the national Community Alert programme, including the employment of regional Development Officers. These Development Officers, operating in Muintir Na Tíre, provide support to Community and Text Alert schemes and offer advice on how to establish new schemes. The long-standing view has been that this is the best use of the resources available to the Department to support effective community crime prevention actions.

At the National Ploughing Championships this year, I was pleased to announce that an additional €100,000 was being made available to Text Alert Groups, registered with An Garda Síochána, to provide modest financial assistance with the running costs they incur each year. This Text Alert Rebate Scheme will be administered by Muintir na Tíre and Groups wishing to participate at the Scheme can find more details at www.muintir.ie.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that I have also secured an additional €100,000 in the budget announced today for local crime prevention initiatives, including the text alert scheme.

Garda Strength

230. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí over each of the past ten years, by rank and division, in tabular form; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [42367/17]

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

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that on 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available, the number of Gardaí was 13,293.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is progressing apace. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the number of Gardaí over each of the past ten years by Rank and Division is as set out in the following tables.

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2008

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	332	72	7	6	1		418
Clare	283	44	5	4	1		337
Cork City	550	106	14	6	1	1	678
Cork North	242	49	4	4	1		300
Cork West	258	43	6	5	1		313
D.M.R. East	396	66	11	3	1		477
D.M.R. North	653	110	20	6	1		790
D.M.R. North Central	605	95	20	4	1		725

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
D.M.R. South	538	89	16	4	1		648
D.M.R. South Central	675	94	19	4	1		793
D.M.R. West	663	109	17	4	1		794
Donegal	400	74	9	4	1		488
Galway West	374	62	8	7	1	1	453
Kerry	280	51	5	4	1		341
Carlow / Kildare	310	56	5	3	1		375
Laois / Offaly	272	54	6	4	1		337
Limerick	532	84	12	6	1		635
Louth	237	49	7	2	1		296
Mayo	267	51	6	6	1		331
Meath	242	48	4	4	1		299
Roscommon / Galway East	235	48	5	5	1		294
Sligo / Leitrim	254	50	7	5	1	1	318
Tipperary	304	66	6	7	1		384
Waterford / Kilkenny	376	62	9	7	2	1	457
Longford / Westmeath	279	49	6	6	1	1	342
Wexford	222	47	6	4	1		280
Wicklow	282	47	9	4	1		343

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2009

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	330	63	6	6	1		406
Clare	286	41	5	4			336
Cork City	580	102	11	5	1	1	700
Cork North	250	43	5	4	1		303
Cork West	256	39	6	4			305
D.M.R. East	407	62	11	2	1		483
D.M.R. North	703	102	21	5	1		832
D.M.R. North Central	610	90	14	4	1		719
D.M.R. South	547	78	13	3	1		642
D.M.R. South Central	671	85	15	4	1		776

Questions - Written Answers

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
D.M.R. West	675	95	14	4	1		789
Donegal	390	63	9	5	1		468
Galway	502	77	11	8	1	1	600
Kerry	282	47	5	4	1		339
Kildare	271	44	3	2	1		321
Laois / Offaly	264	52	6	4	1		327
Limerick	544	77	8	6			635
Louth	251	46	5	3	1		306
Mayo	254	44	5	6			309
Meath	261	44	5	4	1		315
Roscommon / Longford	239	42	5	5	1		292
Sligo / Leitrim	256	48	6	2	1		313
Tipperary	319	63	5	7	1		395
Kilkenny / Carlow	265	37	6	4	1	1	314
Waterford	256	43	5	4	1		309
Westmeath	213	33	6	4	1	1	258
Wexford	233	42	6	4	1		286
Wicklow	302	46	9	2	1		360

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2010

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	309	69	6	6	1		391
Clare	271	40	5	3	1		320
Cork City	574	104	12	6	1	1	698
Cork North	251	48	5	4	1		309
Cork West	261	45	6	5	1		318
D.M.R. East	397	63	10	2	1		473
D.M.R. North	671	106	21	4	1		803
D.M.R. North Central	581	91	16	4	1		693
D.M.R. South	532	79	16	4	1		632
D.M.R. South Central	657	92	17	4	1		771
D.M.R. West	663	104	16	4	1		788
Donegal	386	67	7	5	1		466
Galway	494	85	11	9	1	1	601
Kerry	273	51	5	4	1		334
Kildare	271	44	4	3	1		323

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Laois / Of-faly	258	53	5	3	1		320
Limerick	538	86	12	6	1		643
Louth	254	51	5	3	1		314
Mayo	251	49	5	5	1		311
Meath	254	48	5	5	1		313
Roscommon / Longford	243	48	5	5			301
Sligo / Leitrim	260	46	8	4	1	1	320
Tipperary	312	57	6	7	1		383
Kilkenny / Carlow	264	41	6	4	1	1	317
Waterford	248	44	5	4	1		302
Westmeath	215	36	7	2	1	1	262
Wexford	228	43	5	4	1		281
Wicklow	296	47	8	3	1		355

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2011

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	284	64	6	6			360
Clare	263	37	4	3	1		308
Cork City	568	102	13	6	1		690
Cork North	249	46	5	4			304
Cork West	257	46	6	2	1		312
D.M.R. East	381	58	9	3	1		452
D.M.R. North	658	96	20	4	1		779
D.M.R. North Central	557	83	15	4	1		660
D.M.R. South	511	76	14	3	1		605
D.M.R. South Central	628	85	17	4	1		735
D.M.R. West	655	94	17	4	1		771
Donegal	369	62	6	6	1		444
Galway	493	81	10	9	1	1	595
Kerry	264	43	4	2	1		314
Kildare	269	42	4	2	1		318
Kilkenny / Carlow	254	39	5	4	1		303
Laois / Of-faly	250	45	5	3	1		304
Limerick	536	85	11	4	1		637
Louth	246	49	6	3	1		305

Questions - Written Answers

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Mayo	254	45	4	5	1		309
Meath	247	44	5	5	1		302
Roscom- mon / Longford	232	45	4	5			286
Sligo / Leitrim	256	44	8	3	1	1	313
Tipperary	310	53	6	6	1		376
Waterford	241	41	5	2	1		290
Westmeath	210	36	7	2			255
Wexford	222	42	5	3	1		273
Wicklow	283	45	8	2	1		339

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2012

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	273	63	4	3	1		348
Clare	253	33	4	2	1		293
Cork City	554	105	11	5	1	1	677
Cork North	248	46	4	4	1		303
Cork West	252	43	5	3	1		304
D.M.R. East	358	51	7	3	1		420
D.M.R. North	634	88	16	5	1		744
D.M.R. North Central	556	79	14	4	1		654
D.M.R. South	497	74	12	4	1		588
D.M.R. South Central	605	78	12	4	1		700
D.M.R. West	640	84	15	4	1		744
Donegal	359	56	6	5	1		427
Galway	486	80	8	9	1	1	585
Kerry	252	40	2	3	1		298
Kildare	267	44	4	2	1		318
Kilkenny / Carlow	249	38	5	4	1	1	298
Laois / Of- faly	243	40	2	3	1		289
Limerick	515	78	6	5	1		605
Louth	238	45	5	3	1		292
Mayo	249	42	2	6	1		300
Meath	245	43	4	3	1		296
Roscom- mon / Longford	225	45	4	5	1		280
Sligo / Leitrim	249	43	7	2	1	1	303

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Tipperary	308	51	5	6	1		371
Waterford	238	36	5	4	1		284
Westmeath	207	36	7	2	1	1	254
Wexford	214	37	4				

table cont.

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2013

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	261	59	5	5	1		331
Clare	250	34	4	2	1		291
Cork City	559	104	12	6	1	1	683
Cork North	247	45	4	3	1		300
Cork West	227	39	4	4	1		275
D.M.R. East	346	49	8	3	1		407
D.M.R. North	608	86	14	5	1		714
D.M.R. North Central	525	81	13	4	1		624
D.M.R. South	480	72	12	4	1		569
D.M.R. South Central	585	83	13	4	1		686
D.M.R. West	613	82	17	4	1		717
Donegal	344	54	6	4	1		409
Galway	481	74	10	7	1	1	574
Kerry	246	42	4	3	1		296
Kildare	261	46	4	3	1		315
Kilkenny / Carlow	240	37	6	4	1	1	289
Laois / Offaly	235	40	5	3	1		284
Limerick	504	73	7	4	1		589
Louth	232	44	6	3	1		286
Mayo	254	45	2	5	1		307
Meath	235	42	5	4	1		287
Roscommon / Longford	231	47	3	3	1		285
Sligo / Leitrim	248	46	6	3	1	1	305
Tipperary	307	53	5	5	1		371
Waterford	228	37	4	4	1		274
Westmeath	201	33	6	4	1		245
Wexford	206	37	5	3	1		252
Wicklow	274	43	7	3	1		328

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2014

Questions - Written Answers

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	254	57	6	5	1		323
Clare	242	37	5	2	1		287
Cork City	545	106	13	6	1	1	671
Cork North	240	48	5	3	1		297
Cork West	222	41	4	3	1		271
D.M.R. East	327	50	7	3	1		388
D.M.R. North	572	88	15	5	1		681
D.M.R. North Central	498	90	14	4	1		607
D.M.R. South	457	75	13	3	1		549
D.M.R. South Central	544	80	14	3	1		642
D.M.R. West	593	85	17	4			699
Donegal	330	55	7	4	1		397
Galway	469	82	11	6	1	1	570
Kerry	238	44	5	2	1		290
Kildare	248	45	5	3			301
Kilkenny / Carlow	229	39	6	4		1	279
Laois / Offaly	222	44	6	3	1		276
Limerick	476	75	9	4	1		565
Louth	222	47	8	3	1		281
Mayo	244	45	4	4	1		298
Meath	228	44	4	4	1		281
Roscommon / Longford	227	50	4	3	1		285
Sligo / Leitrim	239	47	6	2	1	1	296
Tipperary	299	50	5	4	1		359
Waterford	223	40	7	3	1		274
Westmeath	198	35	6	4	1	1	245
Wexford	202	40	5	3	1		251
Wicklow	265	46	8	3	1		323

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2015

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	253	55	5	5			318
Clare	246	38	5	2	1		292
Cork City	534	98	11	7	1		651
Cork North	242	47	5	3	1		298
Cork West	230	38	3	4	1		276

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
D.M.R. East	319	50	5	3			377
D.M.R. North	564	86	11	6	1		668
D.M.R. North Central	488	85	12	4	1		590
D.M.R. South	453	71	12	4	1		541
D.M.R. South Central	532	79	11	4	1		627
D.M.R. West	589	80	14	4	1		688
Donegal	331	40	5	5	1		392
Galway	465	78	10	6	1		560
Kerry	250	43	3	3	1		300
Kildare	260	43	5	3	1		312
Kilkenny / Carlow	235	38	5	4	1	1	284
Laois / Offaly	229	40	5	3	1		278
Limerick	468	73	8	4	1		554
Louth	231	44	8	3	1		287
Mayo	249	45	3	5	1		303
Meath	230	41	2	3	1		277
Roscommon / Longford	236	48	3	4	1		292
Sligo / Leitrim	238	46	5	3	1	1	294
Tipperary	298	46	5	4	1		354
Waterford	233	39	6	3	1		282
Westmeath	198	36	5	5	1	1	246
Wexford	210	37	4	3	1		255
Wicklow	263	44	7	3	1		318

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2016

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	251	55	6	5	1		318
Clare	243	41	5	2	1		292
Cork City	522	101	12	6	1	2	644
Cork North	245	46	7	1	1		300
Cork West	227	44	5	4	1		281
D.M.R. East	315	50	7	3	1		376
D.M.R. North	569	88	13	5	1		676
D.M.R. North Central	500	92	15	4	1		612

Questions - Written Answers

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
D.M.R. South	446	84	14	4	1		549
D.M.R. South Central	526	81	18	4	1		630
D.M.R. West	569	83	16	4	1		673
Donegal	321	49	7	4	1		382
Galway	463	87	10	7	1		568
Kerry	245	44	6	3	1		299
Kildare	259	48	5	3	1		316
Kilkenny / Carlow	236	46	7	5	1	1	296
Laois / Offaly	239	48	8	3	1		299
Limerick	462	80	10	6	1		559
Louth	246	45	7	3	1		302
Mayo	238	51	6	4	1		300
Meath	237	38	6	4	1		286
Roscommon / Longford	234	57	5	4	1		301
Sligo / Leitrim	237	49	6	3	1	1	297
Tipperary	299	53	6	5	1		364
Waterford	227	40	6	3	1		277
Westmeath	194	34	7	5	1	1	242
Wexford	211	36	7	3	1		258
Wicklow	244	47	9	3	1		304

Garda Strength by Division and Rank 2017

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Cavan / Monaghan	259	51	7	5	1		323
Clare	254	44	5	2	1		306
Cork City	539	97	12	6	1	1	656
Cork North	255	48	7	2	1		313
Cork West	238	44	4	3	1		290
D.M.R. East	322	49	7	3	1		382
D.M.R. North	572	77	12	4	1		666
D.M.R. North Central	506	76	14	3	1		600
D.M.R. South	458	64	13	4	1		540
D.M.R. South Central	527	69	14	4	1		615
D.M.R. West	571	73	15	4	1		664

DIVISION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
Donegal	333	47	7	4	1		392
Galway	471	84	10	7	1		573
Kerry	258	44	6	3	1		312
Kildare	286	47	6	3	1		343
Kilkenny / Carlow	259	48	6	5	1	1	320
Laois / Of- faly	266	47	8	3	1		325
Limerick	463	74	10	5	1		553
Louth	251	47	5	4	1		308
Mayo	255	50	6	4	1		316
Meath	245	39	6	4	1		295
Roscom- mon / Longford	241	55	4	4	1		305
Sligo / Leitrim	238	49	6	3	1	1	298
Tipperary	312	49	6	5	1		373
Waterford	237	39	6	3	1		286
Westmeath	213	40	7	5	1	1	267
Wexford	228	39	7	3	1		278
Wicklow	248	42	5	3	1		299

*Up to 31 August 2017

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Investigations

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the fact that the GSOC investigation into the death of a person (details supplied) has been ongoing for five years with no outcome for the bereaved family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42377/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): First of all I want to remind the Deputy that the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission is an independent body tasked with the investigation of complaints against members of the Garda Síochána. That independence is crucial to confidence in the process of investigating such complaints. Therefore, it is a matter entirely for GSOC as to how it carries out its investigations and it would be entirely inappropriate for me, as Minister, to comment on any current GSOC investigation and I will not do so.

However, I am very much aware of the particularly tragic case to which the Deputy's question refers.

I am aware that GSOC met with members of the family in question recently. They were given a full update on the current position with regard to the investigation of their complaints.

In the circumstances, I can only say that I await the outcome of the GSOC investigation.

Immigration Policy

232. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to intro-

duce legislation to remove the ban on the right to work of asylum seekers in view of the recent Supreme Court ruling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42382/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Section 16(3)(b) of the International Protection Act 2015 provides that applicants for international protection shall not seek, enter or be in employment or engage for gain in any business, trade or profession during the period before the final determination of their application.

The Supreme Court judgement in the case of *N.V.H. v. The Minister for Justice and Equality* found, on 30 May last, that in an international protection system with no temporal limits as to when the application process will be concluded, an absolute prohibition on the right to work for international protection applicants is contrary to the right to seek employment under the Constitution. The Court recognises that this is a matter for the Executive and Legislature to consider and accordingly has adjourned consideration of the Order the Court should make for a period of six months.

Following the approval of Government, I established an Inter-Departmental Taskforce to examine the wide-ranging implications of the judgement, and to consider appropriate solutions. The Taskforce is also examining the legal options available to the State to give effect to the judgement.

The Taskforce is due to report back to Government shortly in preparation for the State's response to the Court judgement. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me comment further in advance of the Taskforce completing its deliberations on the matter.

Irish Prison Service

233. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the work or strategic planning that is underway to develop a non custodial approach for women offenders in view of the proven success of such models in reducing recidivism. [42383/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are a number of initiatives that have been taken in the area of female offenders who comprise a relatively small group within the criminal justice system in Ireland.

The Report of the Penal Policy Review Group published in September 2014 proposed alternatives to custodial sentences as the first choice of sanction. Chapter 6 of the Report is dedicated to the specific needs of female offenders. Work is underway to progress these recommendations. The Penal Policy Implementation Oversight Group has published three Progress Reports which are available to view on my Department's website. I expect to publish the fourth report in the near future. The recommendations in respect of females are also included in actions 2.12 & 2.13 of the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.

Further, the Probation Service and Irish Prison Service Joint Strategic Women's Plan puts in place a structure for these two agencies to work more effectively with this vulnerable group in society. The Probation Service works very closely with a wide variety of statutory, voluntary and community services and resources. Prompt referral and effective communication with a variety of agencies is beneficial and a key aspect of the model used by the Probation Service in working with women. Focussed interventions help reduce offending, improve opportunities for reintegration and to improve outcomes more generally.

The Abigail Women's Centre run by DePaul Ireland (Tus Nua) was opened in a north Dublin suburb, in December 2014. This is a Probation Service funded project working with women

leaving prison or on probation supervision and provides these women with a safe and positive supported environment. It is a dedicated women's initiative involving a range of agencies working together including the Dublin Regional Housing Executive, Dublin City Council, Probation Service, Irish Prison Service, Health Service Executive and the Dublin City Education and Training Board.

In the afore-mentioned Joint Strategic Women's Plan, the Irish Prison Service gave a commitment to explore the development of an open centre for women assessed as low risk of re-offending. This option was explored by a joint Irish Prison Service/Probation Service working group. Having considered the matter, it decided that rather than developing an open centre, a step down facility for women was a more practical and cost effective approach. The Irish Prison Service and Probation Service are in the process of tendering for the development of a step down unit for women in Dublin.

Prison Service Strategies

234. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his strategy to develop an open prison for women as an alternative to overcrowding in the Dóchas centre and Limerick women's prison. [42384/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that in the joint Probation Service/Irish Prison Service Women's Strategy 2014 - 2016, An Effective Response to Women Who Offend, published in 2014, the Irish Prison Service made a commitment to explore the development of an open centre/open conditions for women assessed as low risk of re-offending.

This commitment was acknowledged in the Report on the Strategic Review of Penal Policy which also recommended a greater focus on step down facilities, supported accommodation, the use of more community based open conditions for female offenders and the provision of an open centre for women.

A joint Irish Prison Service/Probation Service Working Group was then established to consider an open centre for women. The Working Group recommended that, rather than developing an open centre, the preferred option would be to pursue step down facilities for women.

In this regard, approval was given to the Heads of the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service to proceed to scope the possibilities for the development of a step down unit in Dublin. This project is on-going.

A new development for females in Limerick, which work will commence on in early 2018, will when completed, provide 42 rooms with 8 independent living areas. This standalone facility with all the required ancillary services will enhance the regimes and supports available to women.

Deportation Orders

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a deportation order in the case of persons (details supplied) can be set aside; if their case can be urgently reviewed and considered with a view to stamp 4 status. [42400/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned

are the subject of Deportation Orders signed on 15 September 2017. These Orders require the persons concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Orders are a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Naturalisation Applications

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) who is here awaiting a decision for eighteen years can be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42401/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

The records indicate that the person's permission to reside expired on 21 July 2016. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times and failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship through the naturalisation process if and when they are in a position to meet all the statutory conditions for naturalisation under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line residency calculator which may be of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

Immigration Status

237. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if temporary residency status can be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); if their case can be examined on humanitarian grounds, in view of the fact they are receiving specialised medical treatment here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42404/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notifi-

cation pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has not submitted written representations.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. If any representations are submitted, they will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Immigration Status

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a new application for residency status has been received from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42405/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied for residence permission and a right to work based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child on 24 April 2017. I understand that, due to an administrative error, INIS returned the application to the person concerned on 24 April 2017. INIS would like to apologise for this mistake.

I am further advised that the person concerned submitted a new application to INIS on the 28 April 2017. However, this application was returned to the person concerned as the application form and supporting documentation provided were incomplete. To date INIS has not received a new application for permission to remain in the State based on parentage of an Irish citizen child from the person concerned.

If the person mentioned by the Deputy wishes to apply for permission to reside in the State on the basis of their parentage of an Irish citizen child, then it remains open to them to re-submit a fully completed application using the relevant parent of Irish citizen child application form and to forward it with the relevant information and supporting documentation to INIS.

I am further advised by INIS that a separate application for residency in accordance with the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 was submitted by the person concerned on 03 April 2017. As advised previously, this application is currently under consideration and a decision will issue in due course.

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

Immigration Status

239. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the decision to grant stamp 0 status in the case of a person (details supplied); if stamp 0 status can be replaced by stamp 4 in the circumstances in view of the fact the person's family are Irish citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42408/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the person in question, was offered permission to remain in the State on 14 August 2017 on Stamp '0' for one year. No response was forthcoming to that offer. A second offer issued on 26 September 2017, to which INIS is still awaiting a reply. Based on the information available this person does not hold any entitlement to a Stamp 4 immigration status.

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

Naturalisation Applications

240. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will grant naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42409/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation in respect of the persons with the family name referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship through the naturalisation process if and when they are in a position to meet all the statutory conditions for naturalisation under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line residency calculator which may be of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

Persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a birth certificate and marriage certificate. In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their passport, birth certificate or other supporting documents, the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should, where possible, be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities or embassy responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. INIS will consider the reasons given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the

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

Naturalisation Applications

241. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will grant naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42410/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

The records indicate that the person's permission to reside expired on 22 November 2016. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times and failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship through the naturalisation process if and when they are in a position to meet all the statutory conditions for naturalisation under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line residency calculator which may be of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

242. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the deportation order made seven years ago in the case of a person (details supplied) can be reviewed in view of the time elapsed since the making of the order; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42412/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 3rd February 2010.

Representations were received from the person's legal representative, pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. All relevant

aspects of the case will be carefully considered before a decision is made. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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.

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

Visa Applications

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the application for a visa in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42413/17]

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 in question made an application for Family Reunification in respect of the individual concerned in December 2016. The case has recently been finalised and a decision letter issued to the applicant on 27 September 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 established specifically for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the determination of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42414/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the situation remains as set out in my reply to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question 17334/17 of 06 April 2017 in relation to the person concerned. To-date, the person concerned has failed to submit supporting documentation requested by this office on 21 February 2017, 16 June 2017 and 29 September 2017 to allow their application for residency in the State, arising from marriage to an Irish national, to be finalised.

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

Visa Applications

245. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if urgent consideration can be given to the granting of a visa in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42416/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is open to any visa required national to apply for a visa for any purpose. No such application has been made at the present time.

The INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie) contains comprehensive guidelines to assist the applicant with the application process. The information contained on the website is for guidance purposes only and does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that any visa sought should be granted.

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

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

Youth Justice Strategy

246. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to develop a distinct criminal justice strategy for young adults aged 18 to 24 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42452/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, the Programme for Government supports the expansion of Garda Youth Diversion Programmes for young people. This follows on from a recommendation of the Penal Policy Review Group that a programme similar to the existing Youth Diversion Programme be introduced for young people above the age of eighteen years, with an initial focus on eighteen to twenty-one year olds.

The Review Group recognised that implementing the recommendation would require significant consultation with relevant agencies, including An Garda Síochána, as well as consideration of the resource implications, including the personnel requirements within An Garda Síochána and the Irish Youth Justice Service. A fundamental consideration is the extent to which

the existing model for the Garda Diversion Programme for those under 18 might be readily applied or adapted for an older age cohort.

I am advised that there is ongoing engagement between the Irish Youth Justice Service and An Garda Síochána, with a view to scoping out the detailed implications of introducing an extended Diversion Programme, initially for offenders aged eighteen to twenty one years. Part of this work involves an analysis of the nature and scale of offending by persons in that age cohort.

In addition, I can advise the Deputy that a Group, established by the former Garda Commissioner, is undertaking a comprehensive review of the existing Youth Diversion Programme. The outcome of that review will help to inform the consideration of proposals for a programme for young offenders over eighteen years of age.

I can assure the Deputy that I will keep progress in this area under review but, clearly, there is a range of issues that require very careful consideration in this regard.

Sentencing Policy

247. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding requiring the Judiciary to take account of a young person's age and maturity as a mitigating factor in determining a penalty. [42453/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, judges are independent in the matter of sentencing, as in other matters concerning the exercise of judicial functions, subject only to the Constitution and the law.

In regard to sentencing, the approach of the Oireachtas has generally been to specify in law a maximum penalty for an offence, so that a court, having considered all the circumstances of a case, may impose an appropriate penalty up to that maximum. The court is required to impose a sentence which is proportionate, not only to the crime but to the individual offender, in that process identifying where on the sentencing range the particular case should lie and then applying any mitigating factors which may be present.

The decision reached in any court case is a matter entirely for the presiding judge and if a person is not satisfied with the decision the judge makes, it is possible to appeal any decision of that judge to the appropriate appeal court.

Special Areas of Conservation Management

248. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a clubhouse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42541/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy is aware, the location in question is within a National Park, a Biosphere Reserve, Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area. The identification and development of an alternative site in the proximity of the lake would thus be extremely challenging and would be subject to screening for appropriate assessment, a full environment assessment and also planning applications to the relevant County Council. Given the over-riding conservation and ecology concerns in this sensitive area it is unlikely my Department could be supportive of such a proposal at this heritage site.

In the event that the club managed to identify a suitable site where planning permission could be secured, a significant budget would be required to develop same. In this context, it should be noted that the club in question has benefited considerably, and still does, from their current premises being made available to them by my Department without charge. Given the limited resources available for capital investment within the National Parks and Nature Reserves, my Department recognises the need to focus on the core responsibilities relating to the management and conservation of our existing National Parks and Nature Reserves portfolio. Accordingly, we would not be in a position at present to provide any financial assistance for such a development.

The club could consider applying under the *Sports Capital Programme* run by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport or alternatively it could apply under the *Rural Recreation Scheme* operated by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Waterways Ireland Staff

249. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is no civil engineer working on the north and mid Shannon for Waterways Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42934/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have been informed by Waterways Ireland that it has a full complement of Civil Engineering staff working on the North and Mid Shannon navigations.

Waterways Ireland Staff

250. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the recent job advertisement on a website (details supplied) in which ten positions were advertised; the reason only one position was available here in view of the fact that in the lower Shannon area there are six unfilled posts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42935/17]

251. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is deep upset amongst workers of Waterways Ireland with regard to the fact they are of the view that the apportionment of positions between Enniskillen and here do not appear to be balanced between both jurisdictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42951/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 251 together.

I am informed by Waterways Ireland that it undertakes recruitment campaigns throughout the year when required. The recent job advertisement seeking to fill ten positions was part of Waterways Ireland's ongoing recruitment to vacant positions in 2017. On that occasion one of the positions was located in Ireland with the rest located in the North.

I have also been advised by Waterways Ireland that in 2017 to date, there have been fifty nine permanent and temporary posts recruited. Of these, twelve posts were in Northern Ireland and forty seven posts were in Ireland.

In 2016 there were thirty nine permanent and temporary posts recruited, five of these were in Northern Ireland and thirty four posts were in Ireland.

Approximately 25% of Waterways Ireland's current workforce is based in Northern Ireland, where its Headquarters and central functions are located.

There is no basis therefore to support any inference that Waterways Ireland is geographically disproportionate in filling posts.

Hare Coursing Regulation

252. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if each coursing club affiliated to a club (details supplied) in the 2016 to 2017 season contacted their local ranger to advise them of the locations netting of hares was to take place; if so, if there are records of such contact; if contact has been made by clubs in the 2017 to 2018 regarding netting; and if it will be ensured that a directive of the club is adhered to and that records will be kept by NPWS rangers of such contact. [42526/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The current Condition No 5 of the Licence under Section 34 of the Wildlife Act, 1976 (as amended) issued by my Department to the club referred to by the Deputy to capture hares provides that "details of the numbers and locations of the capture of all hares made by the coursing clubs listed in the schedule attached hereto shall be made to the relevant conservation ranger, on or before the weekend of the meeting for which the hares were captured". While this does not specifically require pre-notification of the netting of hares, this does happen in some cases although all such details are not formally recorded. The conditions of licenses issued by my Department in respect of coursing meetings will be kept under review in light of any issues brought to my attention by National Parks and Wildlife officials or by others and I will make any changes that I consider appropriate.

Hare Coursing

253. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of hares coursed in 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42564/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The total number of courses run during the years in question were as follows: 8,811 during the 2014/15 season; 8,408 during the 2015/16 season and 8,278 during the 2016/17 season. To date in the 2017/18 season, four coursing meetings have been held and I am awaiting reports on these meetings.

A more detailed breakdown of the statistics is available on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department at <https://www.npws.ie/licences/hare-coursing>

Hare Coursing

254. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff assigned to monitor hare coursing in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42565/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Of the total Departmental staff, 330 work in the area of natural heritage in the National Parks and

Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department. In addition, my Department takes on about 70 seasonal staff during the year to assist the NPWS. Frontline conservation Rangers are deployed through a regional structure and assignments are determined in light of Departmental business needs and priorities.

Staffing levels across my Department are kept under regular review in line with emerging business needs and Government policy on public sector pay and staffing as advised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As well as managerial regionally based officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department, there are 68 NPWS conservation rangers stationed around the country.

My Department, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service (PAS), recently created a Conservation Ranger Panel. 10 Rangers have been appointed to date from this panel with a further two expected before the end of the year. Any further appointments will be made across the country, taking account of financial resources to meet pay costs in the context of Government policy on public sector pay and staffing.

Within those staffing contexts, officials of my Department monitor compliance with the Wildlife Acts across the country on an on-going basis and carry out patrols and site visits to enforce the various provisions of these Acts, as required. Many of these officers carry out work in more than one county and are engaged in an extensive array of work under the *Wildlife Acts*, in relation to our National Parks and Reserves and in regard to our obligations under the *Birds and Habitats Directives*. They also investigate reports of breaches of the Acts including illegal snaring of badgers, habitat protection issues, as well as monitoring compliance at coursing events etc. Members of An Garda Síochána are also empowered under the Acts to investigate alleged offences and to prosecute if they see fit.

Where resources allow, local National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) conservation rangers and staff attend coursing meetings, on a spot-check basis, to monitor compliance with licences issued to the Irish Coursing Club and its affiliated clubs. During the 2016/17 coursing season, conservation rangers attended seventeen coursing meetings and the same number of meetings was monitored during the 2015/16 season. During the 2014/15 season, six meetings were monitored. While my Department does not have resources to provide 100% attendance at coursing meetings it endeavours to attend as many meetings as possible having regard to the various calls on its staffing complement. Since the 2017/18 coursing season began in the last two weeks, staff of NPWS have monitored 6 coursing events.

Maoiniú Údarás na Gaeltachta

255. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé i gceist aici maoiniú breise a chur ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta do 2018; an ndéanfar cuid den airgead breise sin a chur ar fáil do na comharchumainn agus na comhlachtaí pobalbhunaithe le hordachán ón Aire chuige sin a bheidh ag dul leis an airgead; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [42586/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh) : Is tríd an bpróiseas meastacháin agus cáináise a dhéantar leithdháileadh ar an soláthar airgid a chuirtear ar fáil ar bhonn bliantúil do mo Roinn ón státchiste agus, go deimhin, do na Ranna Rialtais go léir. Sa chomhthéacs sin, is cúis áthais dom a chur in iúl don Teachta go bhfuil maoiniú breise de €100,000 curtha ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta le cur i dtreo forbairt teanga, cultúir agus pobail sa Ghaeltacht in 2018. Tugann an maoiniú breise seo leithdháileadh breise de €350,000 san iomlán don Údarás i leith an réimse seo thar dhá Bhui-

séad.

Ós rud é gur eagraíocht í Údarás na Gaeltachta a bhfuil feidhm neamhspleách aici, tuigfidh an Teachta gur faoin Údarás féin atá sé breithniú a dhéanamh ar chonas an chistíocht a chuirtear ar fáil dó go bliantúil a úsáid.

Is féidir a bheith cinnte de go n-aithním go maith an clár oibre fóna atá idir lámha agus beartaithe ag an Údarás agus go leanfaidh mé orm ag déanamh gach iarracht chun tacú le feidhmiú an chláir oibre sin, oiread agus is féidir, laistigh de na hacmhainní a bheidh ar fáil dom.

Heritage Projects

256. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a number of items from both the WB Yeats collection on display in Dublin and artefacts recently raised from the Spanish Armada off the coast of County Sligo and which are not currently on display can be returned to be displayed to the public in County Sligo with special consideration being given to a centre (details supplied) hosting them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42711/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The matters to which the Deputy refers are a day-to-day matter for both the National Library and the National Museum. I have however referred the Deputy's question to both the National Library and the National Museum for their separate consideration and direct reply.

Ministerial Functions

257. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the powers she has delegated to the Ministers of State in her Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42776/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question Number 119 of the 27th of September last. The Government Chief Whip Joe McHugh T.D. is the only Minister of State currently attached to my Department. Details of the responsibilities delegated by me to Minister of State McHugh are set out in Statutory Instrument No. 315 of 2017, signed by the Taoiseach on 5th July 2017.

The powers delegated to Minister of State McHugh in respect of his role as Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs are the same as those delegated to the previous holder of that office, Minister of State Seán Kyne T.D., as set out in Statutory Instrument No 332 of 2016, which was signed by the Taoiseach on 28th June 2016.

Both of these Statutory Instruments can be viewed on www.irishstatutebook.ie.

Scéimeanna Tacaíochta

258. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad iad na tograí atá ceadaithe aici nó ag an Aire Stáit ina Roinn do thionscadail chaipitil faoi fhomhíreanna C3 agus C9 (Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeltachta agus Oileáin faoi seach) ón 1

Iúil 2017, briste síos de réir an chontae ina bhfuil na tograí agus luach gach togra luaithe leis [42967/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Níorbh fhéidir, san am a bhí ar fáil, na sonraí uile a thabhairt le chéile. Cuirfear freagra ar fáil don Teachta chomh luath agus is féidir.

Irish Language

259. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on developing a facility for those who wish to learn Irish at their own level, independently of a class; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42970/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department provides funding towards the following initiatives which are aimed at learning the Irish language:

Abair.ie

The ABAIR project, based in Trinity College, Dublin, is developing linguistic and speech technology resources for the Irish language. It has produced an online Irish language text-to-speech synthesiser which is freely available at www.abair.ie and which can be used in a learning setting.

VIFAX don Ghaeilge

VIFAX is an Irish language audiovisual learning resource based on TG4 news bulletins and produced weekly throughout the academic year by the Language Centre, Maynooth University. These exercises are based on sport, politics, language, community, technology, business and environment, among other topics. While these exercises are suitable for the classroom at secondary and higher levels, self-directed learners will also find VIFAX useful.

On-line Course in the Irish Language and Irish Traditional Culture

Under development by Dublin City University, this Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is an online degree programme that will focus on the learning of the Irish language *ab initio* and on Irish traditional culture. It is expected to launch this programme early in 2018.

In addition, Foras na Gaeilge, an agency of the North South Language Body, which is co-funded by my Department and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, promotes the Irish language on an all-island basis. In carrying out its legislative mandate, Foras na Gaeilge provides support, advice and financial assistance to many groups who promote the language, including for the provision of courses and activities to help people improve or learn the language. For example, Foras na Gaeilge funds Scéim Pobal Gaeilge 2016-2020 which comprises a network of community-based Irish language development officers who engage directly with communities in order to develop the language at local level. Further information about the work of Foras na Gaeilge is available on its website www.forasnagaeilge.ie.

Irish Language

260. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on allocating funds for scholarships for young persons to support the learning of

Irish in their communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42971/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Foras na Gaeilge, in carrying out its legislative mandate both north and south of the border, provides support, advice and financial assistance to groups who promote the language, including for the provision of courses and activities to help people of all ages to improve or learn the language in their own communities.

Some schemes such as the Youth Events Scheme, the Summer Camp Scheme and the Gaelbharratach Scheme are specifically directed at promoting the language among young people in their communities.

I understand that An Foras also currently funds the allocation of a limited number of Gaeltacht scholarships to young people north of the border.

Further information about the work of Foras na Gaeilge is available on its website www.forasnagaeilge.ie.

Irish Language

261. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on establishing an annual fund that various communities can draw upon to set up Irish language communities that would especially benefit the South; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42972/17]

262. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on increasing the number of Irish language community schemes available to local community committees in order to develop Irish in their own local areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42973/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 262 together.

The Deputy may be aware that the language planning process, as set out in Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, has, at its heart, the key principle of affording communities in Gaeltacht areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and in Irish language networks, the opportunity to develop and implement language plans at local level which seek to underpin the development of the language as a community and household language within such communities. In order to underpin the successful implementation of the process which began in 2014, on-going financial and technical support is being provided by my Department, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge where applicable, to assist communities to develop and implement agreed plans at community level within the process.

In order to further support the process and advance the overall implementation of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, my Department, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge also administer a wide range of supports, schemes, initiatives and measures which seek to further support the development of the language at community level and advance the overall objectives of the strategy.

My Department's Irish Language Support Schemes have as their objective the provision of financial assistance to a range of organisations and activities that support the promotion of the Irish language outside the Gaeltacht. Organisations that receive annual funding include Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, Gaillimh le Gaeilge, Gnó Mhaigh Eo and Gael Taca, Cork. These schemes

also provide funding for small scale capital projects, associated with the promotion of the Irish language outside the Gaeltacht. Most recently, funding was provided to Gaelphobal Thamlachta for the development of an Irish Language and Cultural Centre in Tallaght, Co Dublin.

Under its legislative mandate to promote the Irish language on an all-island basis, Foras na Gaeilge also funds the Irish Language Community Scheme, Scéim Pobal Gaeilge 2016-2020. This four-year scheme, with a total budget of c.€4m, comprises a network of community-based Irish language development officers with facilitation and networking duties in order to empower communities and lead to sustainable language development within the communities themselves.

Support for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht will remain as key priorities in 2018. In that regard, additional funding of €2.5 million which was announced in Budget 2018, will focus on further assisting the delivery of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

263. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff in her Department and agencies under her aegis who were paid salaries between €80,000 and €100,000 in 2015, 2016 and 2017, by job title, amount, name of organisation and-or institution, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42997/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that that the tables below indicate the numbers of staff that were on salaries between €80,000 and €100,000 during the years concerned. It should be noted that this takes account of the reconfiguration of the Department from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2015 to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs in 2016 and more recently to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2017.

2015 - Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Department	Principal Officer Higher	3	€81,080 - €98,995
Department	Principal Officer	9	€75,647 - €92,550
Department	Assistant Principal Officer Higher	2	€67,434 - €83,510
Arts Council	Director	1	€79,401- €97,194
Arts Council	Assistant Principal Officer Higher	1	€67,434-€83,510
Irish Film Board	Director	1	€85,127- €103,976
Irish Film Board	Engineer Grade I	1	€65,000 - €80,140
Chester Beatty Library	Director - Fixed Point	1	€90,591
Irish Museum of Modern Art	Director - Fixed Point	1	€85,720
National Concert Hall	Director - Fixed Point	1	€91,041
National Gallery of Ireland	Director - Fixed Point	1	€93,297
National Gallery of Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€75,459 - €97,092
National Library of Ireland	Director	1	€75,647 - €92,550

Questions - Written Answers

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
National Museum of Ireland	Director	1	€81,080 - €98,995
National Museum of Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€79,401- €97,194
National Museum of Ireland	Keeper	2	€65,000 - €80,140
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	Principal Officer	2	€75,647 - €92,550
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Principal Officer	1	€79,401 - €97,194
Waterways Ireland	Principal Officer	1	€75,647 - €92,550*

2016 - Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Department	Principal Officer Higher	5	€81080 - €98,995
Department	Principal Officer	10	€75,647- €92,550
Department	Assistant Principal Officer Higher	2	€67434 - €83,510
Arts Council	Director	1	€79,401- €97,194
Arts Council	Assistant Principal Officer Higher	1	€67,434-€83,510
Irish Film Board	Engineer Grade I	1	€65,000-€80,140
Chester Beatty Library	Director	1	€81,080-€96,995
Irish Museum of Modern Art	Director - Fixed point	1	€85,720
National Concert Hall	Director	1	€81,080 -€98,995
National Gallery of Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€79,401-€97,194
National Gallery of Ireland	Director - fixed point	1	€93,297
National Library of Ireland	Director	1	€96,726-€109,580
National Museum of Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€79,401-€97,194
National Museum of Ireland	Keeper	2	€65,000-€80,140
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	Principal Officer	2	€75,647-€92,550
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Principal Officer	1	€79,401-€97,194
Waterways Ireland	Principal Officer	1	€75,647-€92,550*

2017 - Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Department	Principal Officer Higher	3	€83,519 - 102,212
Department	Principal Officer	11	€77,849 - 95,487
Department	Assistant Principal Officer	2	€67,434 - 83,510
Arts Council	Principal Officer	1	€81,767-€100,333
Arts Council	Assistant Principal Officer Higher	1	€69,397-€86,054
Irish Film Board	Engineer Grade I	1	€66,777-82,538
Chester Beatty Library	Director	1	€83,519-€102,212

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Irish Museum of Modern Art	Director - Fixed point scale	1	€88,360
National Gallery of Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€81,767-€100,333
National Gallery of Ireland	Director	1	€95,018-€113,711
National Museum of Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€77,849 - €95,487
National Museum of Ireland	Keeper	2	€66,777-€82,538
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	Principal Officer	3	€77,849-€95,487/ €81,767-€100,333
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Principal Officer	1	€81,767-€100,333
Waterways Ireland	Director	1	€98,554*
Waterways Ireland	Principal Officer	2	€77,849-€95,487*

*Waterways Ireland is a North/South body and, depending on their location, some employees are paid in sterling. Sterling earnings are converted at average exchange rate for each year.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

264. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff in her department and agencies under her aegis that were paid salaries over €100,000 in 2015, 2016 and 2017, by job title, amount, name of organisation and or institution, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42998/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that that the tables below indicate the numbers of staff that were on salaries above €100,000 during the years concerned. It should be noted that this takes account of the reconfiguration of the Department from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2015 to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs in 2016 and more recently to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2017.

2015 - Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Department	Secretary General	1	€175,126
Department	Assistant Secretary	4	€119,572 - €136,496
Department	Director	1	€109,580
Heritage Council	Director	1	€109,451.00
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	Director - Fixed Point	1	€113,429.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Director - Fixed Point	1	€126,200.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta	PO Higher	4	€93,119-€103,391
Waterways Ireland	Director - Fixed Point	1	€106,940.00 *

2016 - Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Department	Secretary General	1	€175,126
Department	Assistant Secretary	5	€119,572 - €136,496
Irish Film Board	Director	1	€85,127 - €103,976

Questions - Written Answers

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Heritage Council	Director	1	€109,451.00
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	Director - Fixed Point	1	€113,429.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Director - Fixed Point	1	€126,200.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta	PO Higher	3	€85,127-€103,976
Waterways Ireland	Director	1	€103,528 *

2017 - Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Institution	Grade	No of Staff	Salary Scale
Department	Secretary General	1	€171,533
Department	Assistant Secretary	4	€122,313 - €139,728
Irish Film Board	Director	1	€87,741 - €107,410
National Library of Ireland	Director	1	€96,726 - €109,580
National Museum of Ireland	Director	1	€83,519-€102,212
Heritage Council	Director	1	€113,123.00
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	Director - Fixed Point	1	€115,992.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Director - Fixed Point	1	€128,682
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Principal Officer Higher	4	€87,741-€107,410
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Principal Officer	3	€81,767-€100,333

* Waterways Ireland is a North/South body and, depending on their location, some employees are paid in sterling. Sterling earnings are converted at average exchange rate for each year.

Hare Coursing

265. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a NPWS ranger was present at the hare coursing meeting at Kilflynn, County Kerry on the weekend of 30 September 2017; and the timeframe for a report to be available regarding the welfare and release of the hares that were used as live targets at this event. [42251/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department was present at each day of the recent coursing meeting at Kilflynn, Co. Kerry. A report on that meeting will be prepared and published as soon as possible.

Lobbying Data

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of occasions on which she has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons she has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; her views on the issues raised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42287/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since March 2016, I have received representations in relation to the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill from the Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland, the Galway Healthy Cities Alcohol Forum and the

Alcohol Health Alliance. I have not, however, met with representatives of these or any other organisations in relation to this matter.

Arts Funding

267. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the representations she has received from business organisations in regard to the funding of an event centre in Cork city; and when they were received. [42372/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I can confirm that I received a representation on Cork Event Centre from a business organisation in August 2017. As Cork Event Centre is a project that is being developed and managed by Cork City Council, the correspondence was passed to the Council for consideration and direct response.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

268. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the positions requested and sanctioned by her Department over the past three years in relation to a library (details supplied). [42380/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): From 1 January 2014 to 11 June 2015, the following posts were requested and approved for the National Cultural Institution referred to by the Deputy:

Senior Security Attendant, Attendant, Conservator, Human Resources Manager, Curator, Digitisation Assistant and a Head of Development.

These posts required and received sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Delegated sanction arrangements for bodies under the aegis of my Department came into effect on 11 June 2015. Since 11 June 2015 the following posts have been requested and approved for the same body under this procedure:

Director, 2 Attendants, Facilities & Security Manager, Administration Assistant, Education Officer, Curator, Conservator, Executive Assistant, Head of Digital Services, Educational Assistant, Event Co-coordinator, Registrar, Digital Curator, Assistant Librarian, Head Attendant, ICT Manager, 2 Digitisation Assistants and a Shop Assistant.

Health Services Staff

269. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the cost of restoring all section 39 employees to pre-FEMPI levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42581/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Employees of Section 39 organisations are not public servants and are therefore not encompassed by the Public Service Stability Agreements. This means that they were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which

imposed pay reductions. Section 39 organisations are not obliged to pass on any pay reductions to their staff members or to provide for any pay restoration that may be negotiated as part of these public service agreements.

Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees and therefore, the HSE has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff. It is a matter for Section 39 organisations to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of their employment relationship and within the overall funding available for the delivery of agreed services.

Health Services Staff

270. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the conversations his Department has had with representatives of personal assistants or the persons that they care for regarding the implications of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 on them; and if the making of this category of workers exempt, similar to health care professionals, will be examined. [42623/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has not had any direct conversations with representatives of service users with personal assistants or of personal assistants in relation to the implications of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. However it is my understanding that the HSE have been engaging with representatives of service users who use personal care services on these issues. On that basis, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff Data

271. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the number of personal assistant hours in County Westmeath in the past five years, in tabular form. [42624/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Alcohol Advertising

272. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the reason the experience of a group (details supplied) and its submission on the subject are not included in the Bill which plans to regulate the display of alcohol in supermarkets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42793/17]

273. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if a group (details supplied) is included in all discussions regarding the regulation of the display of alcohol in supermarkets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42794/17]

274. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the regulations that are implemented in the regulation of display of alcohol in supermarkets reflect the difference between the multiple sector and the smaller retailer (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42795/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 272 to 274, inclusive, together.

The Public Health Alcohol Bill is in the Programme for a Partnership Government and is a priority. It is intended that it pass through both the Seanad and Dáil in this session of the Oireachtas.

The Minister for Health has listened to the concerns raised around a possible financial burden on small shops arising from the requirement in the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill in relation to the separation of alcohol products in mixed retail outlets, and he has made clear his intention to reflect those concerns in amendments that he will bring forward to the Bill.

Services for People with Disabilities

275. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the funding concerns of a society (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42917/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

276. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if the budget necessary to enable the HSE reimburse the drug translarna will be provided. [42963/17]

327. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE did not approve the drug translarna that would benefit seven children here. [42634/17]

328. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with the pharmaceutical company that wishes to provide translarna to those suffering from muscular dystrophy. [42635/17]

361. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will re-enter negotiations with a company (details supplied) with a view to finding an acceptable outcome for the provision of translarna for the two persons here with an immediate need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42817/17]

397. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if he has sought an increased budget for the HSE drug group in 2018 to provide for the reimbursement of the drug translarna; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42964/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276, 327, 328, 361 and 397 together.

The Health Service Executive 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.

The HSE informed my Department of its decision not to reimburse Ataluren (Translarna) in July 2017. The HSE decided not to reimburse Translarna citing uncertainty around clinical evidence but advised the company that it would be open to reviewing any additional clinical evidence if any should become available. The HSE informed the manufacturer of this decision, in keeping with the requirements of the 2013 Act. The manufacturer has appealed the HSE's decision to the High Court under Section 27 of the 2013 Act.

As proceedings have now issued against the HSE, this is now subject to the Courts process.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a matter currently before the Courts.

Home Help Service

277. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the level of consultation with home helps in County Kilkenny which is being or has been undertaken by the HSE relative to establishing a new roster system; if a pilot project is being put in place in certain parts of County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42461/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Stroke Care

278. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the facilities available in the CHO 1 region for persons who suffer from a stroke, in relation to acute hospitals and primary care centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42467/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

279. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons in each catchment area of each Jigsaw youth mental health service respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42468/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

280. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42479/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

281. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reopen Clashmore health centre, County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42482/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

282. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if funding for a further podiatrist in County Meath will be made available in budget 2018. [42485/17]

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.

Diabetes Strategy

283. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health his views on findings in recent data showing that County Meath had the largest year on year increase in the number of persons with diabetes hospitalised for foot ulceration treatment. [42486/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

284. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the status for funding in respect of a drug (details supplied) used in the treatment of phenylketonuria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42487/17]

295. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the reason Kuvan, the only drug available to those diagnosed with PKU, was refused by the HSE in view of the fact that it radically improves the quality of life for those with the condition; if he has given consideration to providing funding in order that the drug can be offered to persons here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42510/17]

322. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Kuvan will be made available for sufferers of the genetic disorder phenylketonuria (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42620/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284, 295 and 322 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 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 any relevant expert advice when making its decision, in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Hospital Waiting Lists

285. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42488/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

286. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Meath will receive a hospital appointment. [42490/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

287. **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. [42491/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

288. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a prosthetics for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42493/17]

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.

Minor Ailments Scheme

289. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a report on the introduction of a minor ailment scheme in community pharmacies. [42496/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government is committed to the expansion of the community pharmacy role in managing the health of patients.

A feasibility trial into a minor ailments service was conducted in 2016.

The conditions included in the trial were dry eye, dry skin, scabies, threadworms and vaginal thrush. Further extensive trials will be required in order to progress this area.

The expansion of pharmacy services will be considered. However, any expansion of services should address unmet public health needs, improve access to existing public health services delivered elsewhere or provide better value for money or patient outcomes if delivered through pharmacy.

Community Pharmacy Services

290. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a report on the implementation of e-prescribing in the community. [42497/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Data

291. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the hospitals and specialties that benefited from the recent allocation of 120 advanced nurse practitioners, in tabular form. [42498/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The selection process in relation to the allocation of the advanced nurses practitioner places is ongoing. The outcome of the selection process will be known on 23 October 2017 and I will write to you shortly after that date advising you of the outcome in this regard.

Hospitals Data

292. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of planned cases by doctor in general surgery at Letterkenny University Hospital in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of cases operated on; and the numbers of cases cancelled. [42499/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cancellation of elective procedures can occur for a variety of exceptional reasons including cancellations because a bed or the clinical team are not available, cancellations by the patient or because the patient may not be fit for surgery at the time.

Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients and managing emergency demand at times is challenging, however all efforts are made to limit cancellations particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

293. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for a third paediatric rheumatologist to combat the waiting list for persons with juvenile arthritis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42502/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly regarding the actions being taken to address waiting times for children who require rheumatology services across the three children's hospitals.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

294. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements in place for collecting moneys under the nursing home support scheme; the amounts received in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 under this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42509/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): These figures are not available to my Department. This matter falls under the remit of the Department of Finance. I understand that my colleague, Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Finance, will provide the Deputy with an answer to the question raised.

Question No. 295 answered with Question No. 284.

HSE Funding

296. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason an application for HSE national lottery grants submitted by a service (details supplied) was unsuccessful; if this decision may be appealed by the service; the other suitable sources of funding for which the service may apply in this circumstance in view of the fact that this service has now been placed in jeopardy as a result of this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42515/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

297. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an audio test for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42520/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service

298. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the reason full-time staff employed by the HSE for home help are excluded from the general staffing numbers in the HSE;

his views on whether this is appropriate and respects the dignity of the HSE employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42521/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Directly employed HSE home help workers are regarded as employees and are recorded on HSE payrolls. While the HSE records data for home help workers, they are not currently included in the general staffing numbers for historical reasons.

Home help workers were not always classified as employees. Following a Labour Court ruling in 1997, home help workers established employment status. This led to 4,000 WTE (12,000 headcount) home help numbers being collected as part of health service personnel statistics. It was decided to report them separately to avoid a sudden 4,000 increase in overall WTE numbers. In addition, in some counties, home help services are provided exclusively by Section 39 agencies and consequently, home help workers are not employed by the HSE in those locations. As a result, for these counties, the WTE value would be zero, leading to a potential impression of staffing shortages in these counties.

Accepting the desirability for consistent reporting of both pay and numbers, and acknowledging the need to allow for comparison across years, my Department, the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are engaging on this issue in relation to future reporting.

It should be noted that home help workers have, for some time, acquired all the same terms and conditions of employment, including pension entitlements, as any other cohort of staff and are not differentiated on that basis.

Hospital Appointments Status

299. **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. [42525/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

General Practitioner Services

300. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Shannondoc service in the Shannon region, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42527/17]

301. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Shannondoc service in the Shannon region, County Clare being provided during weekends; if

the service has been downgraded; if a decision has been made to downgrade it in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42528/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 301 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

302. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the licence for pembrolizumab to cover rare cancers (details supplied). [42530/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Data

303. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the funding available for home care packages of approximately €149 million and the additional €9 million supported by HSE and an organisation (details supplied) available for intensive home care packages, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42545/17]

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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

304. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a delay in providing an appointment for orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42546/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

305. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE plans to put a permanent ward in the Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda for COPD patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42547/17]

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 Consultant Contracts

306. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of dedicated respiratory consultants for Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42548/17]

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

Hospital Admissions

307. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD, patients admitted into the RCSI hospital group in the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, by location; the number of days COPD patients spent admitted as inpatients during the same time period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42549/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

308. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if sufficient funding will be sought from his Department in the context of budget 2018 to meet the cost of purchasing medical equipment for those on a waiting list for same (details supplied). [42550/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

309. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the appointment of an oncologist with a special interest in Sarcoma for St. Vincent's hospital; the actions undertaken to fill this post since the interview process; the name of the successful person; the anticipated start date of the person; the reason for the length of time it has taken to fill this post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42552/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to her.

Hospital Charges

310. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to changes to ultrasound charges at a hospital (details supplied) in Dublin 1; the reason for the change to hospital policy in this regard; his views on whether the charging for a scan such as this is acceptable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42566/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Question No. 311 withdrawn.

General Medical Services Scheme

312. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason versatis 5% medicated plaster has been taken off the medical card since 1 September 2017, (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons will be forced into the day ward system as a result of same; and the pressure and estimated costs on hospitals. [42578/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key objective of the health service. However, the challenge is to deliver this objective in an affordable and sustainable manner. The medicines bill for the community drugs schemes – primarily the GMS, Long Term Illness and Drugs Payment, as well as the High Tech Arrangement, is forecast at just over €1.7 billion in 2017.

To ensure patients receive the highest quality care, it is essential that the resources invested in medicines are used efficiently and effectively. This requires an integrated approach to secure best value for money for all treatments, greater efficiencies across the supply chain and also the use of the most cost-effective treatments.

In 2013, the HSE established the Medicines Management Programme (MMP). It is headed by the National Medicines Information Centre (NMIC) and the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE), in collaboration with the HSE-Primary Care Reimbursement Service (HSE-PCRS), and provides sustained national leadership on issues such as medicines management, access to medicines and the cost effective provision of medicines in Ireland. The MMP has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve evidence-based and cost-effective prescribing nationally and the review of Versatis is an example of this.

Versatis 5% medicated plaster is licensed for the symptomatic relief of neuropathic pain associated with previous herpes zoster (shingles) infection, known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), in adults. Following an MMP review of the evidence available for the use of Versatis, the HSE introduced a new system for reimbursement of Versatis from 1 September 2017. This process will support the appropriate use of Versatis, ensuring that PHN patients continue to have receive this treatment. The HSE estimates that this protocol will reduce expenditure on this product by approximately 90%.

Versatis has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010. Initially, the projected budget impact was low due to the specific licensed indication. However, total expenditure has increased significantly, from €9.4 million in 2012 to over €30 million in 2016, due to off-license use as a general treatment for pain not associated with shingles. Currently, over 25,000 patients are in receipt of this item. The MMP report highlighted that the clinical evidence for Versatis in PHN is limited due to lack of comparative data and its value is uncertain for all other types of pain. The NCPE estimates that, in Ireland, between 5-10% of the prescribing of this product is for the licensed indication of PHN.

All patients who currently receive antivirals for shingles, or patients who are prescribed antivirals for shingles in the future, will automatically be approved for Versatis for three months. No action is required by GPs and the patient's pharmacy will be notified of his or her approval status.

All patients who currently use Versatis have been identified and automatically registered on the HSE-PCRS system for three months and will continue to receive the treatment from their

pharmacy until 30 November 2017. However, from 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients will no longer be dispensed Versatis under the community drugs schemes. The HSE has produced patient information leaflets and advised GPs on treatment alternatives.

In exceptional circumstances, the product may be dispensed for unlicensed indications. GPs will make an application for reimbursement for unlicensed indications for new and existing patients through the online system. Applications will be reviewed by the MMP before a decision is made and communicated to the GP.

Full details of the review of Versatis are available on the HSE website at

<http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/medicinemanagementprogramme/your-medicines/lidocaine-plaster/lidocaine-medicated-plaster.html>.

As this is a matter for the HSE, I have no role in this decision in relation to individual treatments. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Hospital Appointments Status

313. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42583/17]

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.

Civil Marriages Data

314. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for each civil registration office for persons that are seeking an appointment to notify the civil registration office of their intention to marry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42591/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Civil Registration Service is operated by the Health Service Executive on behalf of the General Register Office under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection. I have referred your question to the Health Service Executive to address the specific issue raised and for direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy

315. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that occupational therapists in County Mayo are not carrying out risk assessments on pre-school-going children with special needs under the newly introduced access inclusion

model; the reason occupational therapist services are not carrying out these assessments; the steps he has taken to resolve this issue; if he will consider reverting back to the previous system (details supplied) in order that pre-school-going children with special needs can avail of necessary supports to assist in their attendance at school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42595/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

316. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo can expect to have their next occupational therapy appointment; his views on whether it is unfair that this person has had no appointment since February 2017; the steps that he is taking to alleviate waiting times in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42596/17]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

317. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo is now being asked to apply for the renewal of their card under regular regulations; the reason their card has not automatically been renewed under the EU Regulation 1408/71 as per the original application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42597/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

318. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see a consultant neurologist in County Donegal; the length of time these persons have been waiting; if a second neurologist has been appointed; the way in which the appoint-

ment will impact on waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42599/17]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme

319. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the general practitioner blood tests under the medical card scheme (details supplied); the general practitioner functions that are not covered under the medical card scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42607/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with ‘all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess.’ There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP, or the Practice Nurse on behalf of the GP, which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition. The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient’s symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that in recent times some GPs have begun to charge GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position of the Government and the Oireachtas that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient may make a complaint to the HSE Local Health Office, who will deal with the matter in accordance with the HSE’s Complaints Policy. In order to achieve clarity on this issue, I have asked that any difference of perspective in relation to the provision of phlebotomy services be addressed in the GP contractual review process, which is currently underway. The aim is to develop a contract which has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions. I look forward to constructive and positive engagements with a view to achieving a satisfactory outcome.

The GMS contract stipulates that fees are not paid to GPs by the HSE in respect of certain medical certificates which may be required, for example, “under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences”. Consultation fees charged by GPs outside the terms of the GMS or GP Visit Card contracts are a matter of private contract between the clinicians and their patients.

Hospital Appointments Status

320. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a procedure. [42617/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy’s questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Appointments Status

321. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment with a consultant. [42619/17]

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.

Question No. 322 answered with Question No. 284.

Protected Disclosures

323. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a protected disclosure submitted to his Department by a person (detailed supplied) has been processed. [42622/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): All protected disclosures submitted to my Department are given due attention in keeping with my Department's protected disclosures policy and procedures and in accordance with the requirements under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014. Given that all protected disclosures must be treated as confidential, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on a specific case.

Hospital Appointments Status

324. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will receive two operations which have been triaged as urgent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42625/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

325. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [42631/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

326. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting occupational therapy services in County Wexford; the number of those waiting that are under 18 years of age; and the average waiting time for those awaiting these services [42632/17]

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.

Questions Nos. 327 and 328 answered with Question No. 276.

Hospital Appointments Status

329. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will receive urgent prioritisation for scoliosis treatment here. [42636/17]

330. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the way in which his Department and the HSE have assisted a person (details supplied). [42637/17]

331. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the way in which his Department and the HSE plan to assist a person (details supplied). [42638/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 329 to 331, inclusive, together.

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.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

332. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the date on which the compassionate access programme for medicinal cannabis will come into operation. [42648/17]

333. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the expert group charged with developing the operational, clinical and practice guidelines for the

compassionate access programme for medicinal cannabis has met; the dates on which it has met; and the names of those on this expert group. [42649/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 332 and 333 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, in March 2017, on foot of the conclusions from the Health Products Regulatory Authority's report 'Cannabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review', I established an Expert Reference Group to advise on the development of a Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme.

The Expert Group is chaired by Dr Mairín Ryan, Director of Health Technology Assessment at the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), and comprises representation from the areas of oncology, palliative care, anaesthesiology, general practice, adult neurology, paediatric neurology, multiple sclerosis, psychiatry, pharmacy, patients, and ethics as well as representatives from HIQA, the HPRA, the National Medicines Information Centre and the Department of Health. To date this group has met seven times.

The Expert Group is tasked with the development of clinical guidance for healthcare professionals treating patients through the Access Programme. A critical requirement for the successful establishment of the Access Programme is meaningful engagement with representative bodies, clinicians, patients, and pharmacists so that these groups are integral to the drafting of operational clinical guidance. This has involved continuous ongoing dialogue between the Experts and third parties throughout this initiative. The Group conducted a targeted consultation on the draft guidance, which will be finalised shortly. The Expert Group are also considering other operational aspects for the implementation of the Access Programme.

Officials in my Department are working on secondary legislation to underpin the programme and on the logistics of sourcing suitable cannabis-based product supplies for the Irish market place. This work will take a number of months to complete.

As I have previously advised, pending implementation of the Cannabis Access Programme, and for medical conditions that are not included in the Access Programme, under existing legislation it is open to me as Minister to consider granting a licence to an Irish registered medical practitioner, under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, for access to medical cannabis for named patients. The Chief Medical Officer has advised that the granting of such a licence must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time. The decision to prescribe cannabis for medical use rests with the clinician, in consultation with their patient. As Minister for Health I have no role in this clinical decision-making process.

Where a consultant requires information or clarification in relation to the licence application process, he or she should contact my Department directly.

The Cannabis Reference Group has met on the following dates:

- 30 March 2017;
- 11 April 2017;
- 9 May 2017;
- 23 May 2017;

- 16 June 2017;
- 27 June 2017; and
- 10 October 2017.

The membership of the group is as follows:

CRG Member	Representing
Dr Mairín Ryan	HIQA and Chairperson
Dr Seamus O'Reilly	RCPI - Medical Oncologist
Prof Tony O'Brien	RCPI – Consultant physician in palliative medicine
Dr Peter Widdess-Walsh	RCPI – Consultant Neurologist
Dr Chris McGuigan	RCPI - Consultant Neurologist
Dr Bryan Lynch	RCPI – Paediatric Neurologist
Dr Mike Scully	Consultant Psychiatrist – College of Psychiatrists
Dr Brendan Conroy	Pain Specialist & Anaesthetist - The College of Anaesthetists of Ireland
Dr Des Crowley	General Practitioner - Irish College of General Practitioners
Dr Cora Nestor	Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
Keith O'Hourihane	Pharmacist - Community Pharmacy representative
Professor David Smith	Ethicist - Royal College of Surgeons Ireland
Joan Jordan	Patient representative - European Patients Academy on Therapeutic Innovation
Aileen Tierney	Patient representative
Elaine Breslin	Health Products Regulatory Authority
Dr Patricia Harrington	HIQA
Eugene Lennon	Principal Officer, Department of Health
Maria Egan	Pharmacist - Department of Health
Vanessa Lyons	Health Products Regulatory Authority
Niamh O'Rourke	National Clinical Effectiveness Committee, Department of Health
Eamonn Quinn	Pharmacist - Department of Health
Claudine Hughes	Chief Pharmacist - National Medicines Information Service

Nursing Staff Provision

334. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the steps which will be taken to replace eight front-line hospital and community based nurses in counties Laois and Offaly who are due to go on maternity leave over the coming months. [42651/17]

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.

HSE Staff Recruitment

335. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to fill a post (details supplied) in community health services in County Laois. [42652/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Delays

336. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42672/17]

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.

HSE Funding

337. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding within the HSE to carry out valve replacement surgery and the purchase of replacement valves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42673/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

338. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for joint replacement operations in the Royal College of Surgeons hospital group, by individual hospital, for each of the past three years; the number of such replacement joint operations carried out in the hospitals; the locations in which they were carried out for the same period; if persons were sent to other hospitals outside this region during this period; if so, the locations to which they were sent; the cost of these operations; if a cap on the number of replacement operations per annum has been introduced; if so, the reason therefor; the date it was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42676/17]

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

Home Help Service Provision

339. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours on the weekend will be provided in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42692/17]

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.

Infectious Diseases

340. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the increasing number of persons contracting Lyme disease; if he will instruct the HSE to be more supportive in recognising this illness; if he will request the HSE to provide and install diagnostic treatment units throughout the country, for example, equipment for blood testing for this particular disease; if he will put a programme in place in order that general practitioners can be fully familiarised with the symptoms that arise from a person being bitten by a tick; and if persons that are affected by this disease will be given consideration for approval when applying for a medical card. [42696/17]

371. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the supports in place for persons with Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42833/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 340 and 371 together.

Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the HSE has published extensive information concerning Lyme disease on its website. This contains information for the public on protection measures as well as information for healthcare professionals on diagnostics measures and clinical management. The website address is:

www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vectorborne/lymedisease/.

Lyme borelliosis was made statutorily notifiable in Ireland by the Infectious Diseases (Amendment Regulations) Regulations 2011 (S.I. no 452 of 2011). The number of annual neuroborreliosis notifications over the last few years is as follows: 2012 - 8 cases, 2013 - 13 cases, 2014 - 18 cases, 2015 - 12 cases, and 2016 - 21 cases (provisional). However, recent estimates suggest that, due to underreporting of mild cases, there may be up to 50-100 cases in Ireland per year. The Weekly Infectious Disease Report, published by the HPSC on 4 October 2017, indicated that for week 39-2017 (24/9/17-30/9/17) there have been 10 cases notified so far in 2017 – a decrease of 4 on the same period last year.

Lyme borreliosis can be asymptomatic or have a range of clinical presentations. Current best advice is that diagnosis should be made only after careful consideration of the patient’s clinical history, physical findings, laboratory evidence and exposure risk. The diverse nature of these symptoms, which can have both physical and psychological causes, are shared by many conditions which has implications for both diagnostic and treatment services. Exposure to ticks prior to disease manifestations is necessary for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Since an awareness or recollection of a tick-bite is not always present, however, this should not exclude the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Later stages require the use of antibody detection tests (or advanced DNA detection techniques). Testing for Lyme Disease is provided routinely by all major, regional hospitals in Ireland. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient’s samples are referred to the U.K.’s Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory Service of Public Health England in the Porton Down facility which uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities. This involves a screening serological test followed by a confirmatory serological test. All laboratories must undergo continuous quality assurance to ensure that the quality of the diagnostics they provide is maintained at the highest international level for human diagnostics.

Testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland in all major hospitals. Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, then management of patients can be undertaken by Infectious Disease consultants in regional hospitals when intravenous antibiotics may be considered as a method of treatment.

Primary Care Centres

341. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the opening hours for the Derrinturn and Johnstownbridge health centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42701/17]

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.

Autism Support Services

342. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list times for occupational therapists assessments in the regional autism services, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42708/17]

343. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will be seeking more funding for autism services in budget 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42709/17]

344. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for children on the autism spectrum looking to access preschool services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42710/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 342 to 344, inclusive, together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

345. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health if funding for a further podiatrist in County Wexford will be made available to support persons with diabetes; if his attention has been drawn to the recent data released which indicates that County Wexford has the largest year on year increase in the incidence of diabetes related foot ulcers and amputations; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [42712/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

346. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for an MRI scan for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42717/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

347. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42726/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Staff

348. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff vacancies which have occurred at the psychiatric unit at Letterkenny University Hospital in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the dates on which each such vacancy was filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42727/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospitals Data

349. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of operating theatres for orthopaedic surgery available in Galway university hospital; if these theatres are on the Merlin Park campus; if not, the reason the theatres that were on this campus are not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42731/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Saolta University Healthcare Group advise that Galway University Hospitals currently have four orthopaedic surgical theatres. Two of these theatres are located on the University Hospital Galway campus and provide trauma surgical services. The remaining two theatres are located on the Merlin Park campus and provide elective orthopaedic surgical services.

My Department was advised by Saolta that a leak developed in the roof of a building in the Merlin Park hospital campus that houses the Hospital's two orthopaedic theatres on the 4 September. At this time hospital management temporarily suspended operations for a week to facilitate the Galway University Hospital Buildings and Maintenance Unit to effect repairs.

A second leak was noted on the 13 of September and Saolta advise that a multi-disciplinary team, consisting of members of the hospital's management and infection control teams and the HSE's West Estates division, took the immediate decision, in the interest of patient safety, to suspend operations in the two theatres to allow a full assessment of the infrastructural damage and the development of a plan to effect a complete repair of the damage.

As a result, elective orthopaedic surgeries are now being deferred at Merlin Park and affected patients are being contacted by the Hospital. It should be noted however that no emergency patients have been affected.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

350. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for orthopaedic surgery at Galway university hospital for more than two years and less three years, for three years and less than four years and for four or more years; the steps being taken to reduce the waiting time for such operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42732/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, over 25,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 6,906 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its initiatives, 2,683 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a

private hospital and that 1,309 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 3,161 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 1,106 offers of treatment have been accepted and 436 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, over 89,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

351. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons referred under the treatment purchase fund in 2017 for orthopaedic operations in the Galway region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42733/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, over 25,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 6,906 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its initiatives, 2,683 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 1,309 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 3,161 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 1,106 offers of treatment have been accepted and 436 patients have been treated. Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, over 89,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In response to the particular query raised, the NTPF have advised that 17 patients waiting 15 months or more for an orthopaedic procedure in Co. Galway have been offered treatment to date.

Primary Care Centres Provision

352. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the progress with regard to the provision of a primary health care centre in Swords, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42734/17]

353. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the progress with regard to the provision of a primary health care centre in Malahide, County Dublin; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [42735/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 352 and 353 together.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Hospitals Building Programme

354. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a project (details supplied) at the University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42747/17]

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

Emergency Services

355. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will establish an adrenaline station in Leinster House as a matter of good practice, with a view to setting up such a provision in all workplaces, community facilities and schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42752/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that in October 2015, my predecessor, Minister Leo Varadkar T.D., signed regulations which allow certain prescription-only medicines to be administered by trained members of the public in emergency situations. It is important to note that these regulations do not in any way change the existing ‘good Samaritan’ rule, which allows any member of the public to assist a person in distress to administer a medicine which has been prescribed to them. Equally, these regulations in no way diminish the responsibility or the importance of people continuing to carry the medicines that they need to manage their own health needs.

In order for an organisation to avail of an emergency medicine without the need for a prescription, they must first register with the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and undergo a training course accredited by the Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC). This register is publically available through the Emergency Medicines Portal on the HPRA website and can be found at

www.hpra.ie/homepage/medicines/emergency-medicines/emergency-medicines-search/results.

There is currently a total of 14 organisations, and 21 accountable persons, listed on the register for Emergency Medicines. Each organisation may register more than one site and more than one accountable person.

Prescription-only medicines (POMs), such as adrenaline auto-injectors, are so designated because there are safety concerns about these medications. The administration of a POM should not be done lightly and should only occur following appropriate training. Any decision to undergo training on the use and administration of an emergency medicine rests with individual organisations.

Ministerial Functions

356. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such a delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42782/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have delegated responsibilities to the three Ministers of State assigned to my Department as follows:

Finian McGrath, TD, Minister of State for Disabilities at my Department, has been delegated responsibility for all legislation, policy and funding relating to the provision of specialist health and personal social services to persons with a disability. The Order S.I. No. 335 of 2017 Health (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No. 2) Order 2017 delegating these functions was signed by the Taoiseach on the 18 July 2017.

Catherine Byrne, TD, Minister of State has been delegated responsibility for Communities, the National Drugs Strategy and also the additional responsibility of Health Promotion. The Order S.I. No. 339 of 2017 Health (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No. 4) Order 2017 delegating these functions was signed by the Taoiseach on the 18 July 2017. I have also assigned responsibility for Social Inclusion issues to Minister Byrne on a non-statutory basis.

Jim Daly, TD, Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People has been delegated responsibility for all legislation, policy and funding relating to the provision of mental health services for adults, children and adolescents, including the strategy on suicide prevention. Minister Daly will also be responsible for all services for older people, including the Nursing Support Scheme. The Order S.I. No. 340 of 2017 Health (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No. 3) Order 2017 delegating these functions was signed by the Taoiseach on 18 July 2017.

The Orders also include any new relevant legislation pertaining to the areas of responsibility given to the Ministers of State which has been enacted in the period since the last delegation orders were made.

Hospital Services

357. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary resources will be provided to a hospital (details supplied) to launch a new service before the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42796/17]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

358. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 65 years of age in the fair deal scheme, under the nursing homes support scheme; and the number of persons under 65 years of age in receipt of it in each of the years 2012 to 2016. [42797/17]

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.

Psychological Services

359. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Wexford awaiting primary care psychology services; the number of those children waiting longer than 12 months, 24 months and more than 36 months respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42807/17]

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.

Psychological Services

360. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the inability of primary care psychology services in County Wexford to offer urgent appointments; and when this matter will be addressed. [42808/17]

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. 361 answered with Question No. 276.

Psychological Services

362. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a psychology appointment in primary care; and the number waiting more than a year. [42823/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

363. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the progress regarding the commitments he made in respect of reducing surgery waiting times for children with scoliosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42825/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is actively implementing the action plan they developed to ensure that no child will be waiting over 4 months by year end and are focussed on maximising all available capacity both internally and externally to achieve this target.

Additional nurses are now in post in both Crumlin and Temple Street. An additional consultant orthopaedic surgeon commenced last month in Crumlin. So far in 2017, 272 scoliosis procedures have been carried out across all hospitals, in comparison to 220 procedures for the entire year in 2016. This represents a 24% increase with 11 weeks of the year remaining.

The HSE has also completed an international tender for paediatric spinal fusion procedures

and three hospitals have been successful. These hospitals have commenced patient reviews with a view to commencing treatment this month for patients whose families want to take up the offer of having procedures carried out in overseas hospitals.

The HSE has also developed a forecasting model to predict on a weekly and monthly basis the numbers of patients expected to receive surgery by year end. This is assisting the HSE further in monitoring the progress made in achieving the target.

The overall number of patients waiting for scoliosis procedures has been reducing this year and progress continues in delivering on the four month target announced by the HSE by the end of 2017 in a planned, safe and sustainable manner.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

364. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists who were due to receive scheduled treatment during October, November and December 2017 who have been notified that their procedure has been postponed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42826/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I fully acknowledge the distress and inconvenience for patients and their families when elective procedures are cancelled.

Maintaining scheduled care access is a key priority for hospitals, and balancing this with emergency demand is challenging. However, all efforts are made to limit cancellations, particularly for clinically-urgent procedures.

Cancellation of elective procedures can occur for a variety of reasons including because a bed or the clinical team are not available, cancellations by the patient or because the patient may not be fit for surgery at the time.

Based on data provided by the NTPF on average around 3,400 elective procedures are cancelled per month. However, this must be seen in context of an average of 53,000 admissions to acute hospitals on a daycase and an inpatient basis per month.

The NTPF National Inpatient/Daycase Planned Procedure Waiting List Management Protocol published in early 2017 sets out the national protocols for the management of waiting lists, including the scheduling of patient treatment. Under this Protocol, and in line with best practice, patients should not be scheduled for treatment more than six weeks in advance. On this basis, the HSE has advised that patients will not have been scheduled, as yet, for treatment in November and December. Also, data on cancellations are reported to the NTPF after cancellation and therefore are not available in advance.

The HSE continues to work with hospitals to improve the management of emergency care demand and planning of elective procedures to minimise the impact on patients, as well as the number of sessions lost through cancellations or "Do-Not Attends".

As the Deputy is aware, the Department of Health has commenced a Health Service Capacity Review, the findings of which are due to be published before the end of the year and will inform future capacity developments.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

365. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the vacancy rates for consultants, doctors, nurses and midwives in the HSE; and his plans to fill those vacancies while also retaining existing staff in the HSE. [42827/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly concerning the vacancy rates requested. However, it should be noted that typically the HSE does not operate a 'vacancy rate', but rather records a staff turnover rate. The HSE estimates that for 2016, the adjusted turnover rate was 5.7%. This means that, each year, at any one time, people will be moving in and out of about 1 in 20 posts across the HSE. This can be for a range of reasons such as simply moving to a new location but still within the HSE, retirements, resignations or other types of leave such as maternity leave. When a position is vacated, work may be covered through a variety of measures such as redeployment, restructuring or reallocation of the work. Also, it may be necessary for the duties to be covered by agency or overtime.

The need to increase the numbers of consultants, doctors, nurses and midwives in the public health service is a priority for me, my Department and the HSE against a backdrop of global shortages.

At the end of August 2017 there were 2,913 whole time equivalent consultants in the public health services. This is 103 more than the end August 2016 figure and an increase of over 700 in the past decade. At the end of August there were 6,209 whole time equivalent NCHDs, an increase of 278 on the August 2016 figure and an increase of over 1,300 in the past decade. The HSE has been focused on addressing issues associated with the creation and approval of consultant posts and successful recruitment. It is now giving effect to the report 'Towards Successful Consultant Recruitment, Appointment and Retention', completed in December 2016. It is also focused on implementing the recommendations of the 'MacCraith Group' to support the recruitment and retention of NCHDs.

The Nursing Recruitment and Retention Agreement concluded with the INMO and SIPTU Nursing earlier this year committed to increasing the number of nurses and midwives by 1,224 additional permanent posts in 2017. The recent quarterly progress report (30th Sept 2017) from the HSE states that the HSE has filled 20% of the target posts. However, the report shows that there is an increase of 739 whole time equivalents between August 2016 and August 2017. In addition, the HSE is currently concluding the process of offering all graduating nurses and midwives permanent contracts and is focused on the conversion of agency employees into HSE direct employees. This is expected to deliver a significant increase in staff nurse numbers between now and year-end.

The Public Service Pay Commission will also be examining the reasons behind the recruitment and retention issues faced by some public service grades in the next phase of its work. This will include certain health sector grades, including doctors, nurses and radiographers. I look forward to reading their findings in 2018.

Community Care

366. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the Mental Health Commission's call for it to be given powers to regulate community-based care services. [42828/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Mental Health Commission is a statutory body whose functions are set out in the Mental Health Act 2001. Among the key responsibilities of the Commission is the establishment and maintenance of

a Register of Approved Centres. The Act also provides that the Inspector of Mental Health Services visit, inspect and report on every approved centre at least once every year. Details of these inspection reports, including compliance issues, are available on the Commission website. While the Commission has the authority to visit and inspect any other premises where mental health services are being provided, the enforcement powers of the Commission only apply in the case of approved centres.

As regards the regulation of community based services by the Commission, the Deputy may be aware that the Expert Group Review of the Mental Health Act 2001 examined this issue in detail in its 2015 Report. The Expert Group recommended that a proportionate and risk based system of inspection should be developed by the Commission. This would include a phased introduction of registration and inspection of all community mental health teams. In addition, all High, Medium and Low Support Hostels, Crisis/Respite Houses, other Residential Services, Day Hospitals and Day Centres would also be subject to inspection and enforcement by the Commission.

The Expert Group also suggested that in order to enhance the standard of care that is being provided in approved centres, the revised legislation should provide for the Mental Health Commission to make standards in respect of all mental health services and to inspect against those standards. The standards would be made by way of regulations and the regulations would be underpinned by way of primary legislation.

Amendments to the Mental Health Act 2001 based on the recommendations of the Expert Group Review of the Act are currently being progressed. Government approved plans to proceed with the general scheme of a bill and officials are working on the heads of the amending bill which will legislate for the recommendations of the Review, including those relating to the proposed registration and inspection of community mental health services.

My Department and I accept the importance of advancing this work as quickly as possible and we acknowledge that it is taking longer than stakeholders in this area would like. That said, it is a comprehensive legislative undertaking which must also now take account of the provisions of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 which was enacted after completion of the Expert Group Report. I expect the text of the General Scheme of a Bill to be progressed by the end of the year.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

367. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which it is proposed to reduce the long waiting times being experienced by children in County Kildare who are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [42829/17]

372. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which it is proposed to reduce the long waiting times being experienced by children in counties Laois and Offaly who are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [42834/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 and 372 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

368. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the appointment of dementia care co-ordinators and dementia advisers in each local health office area will be considered. [42830/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Alzheimer Society of Ireland's pre-budget submission recommends the appointment of dementia care coordinators and dementia advisers in each local health office area, in addition to an investment of €35 million in home care services and the appointment of dementia friendly community coordinators. I had a constructive meeting with representatives of the Alzheimer Society on 29 August where these matters were discussed.

In response to the rising number of people with dementia, currently estimated at 55,000, 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. The Strategy emphasises that most people with dementia live in their own communities and can continue to live well and to participate in those communities for far longer than many people appreciate.

In parallel with the Strategy, the Department of Health and the HSE 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 €27.5m, with the Atlantic Philanthropies contributing €12m and the HSE €15.5m. The Programme includes the provision of intensive home care packages for people with dementia, the upskilling of GPs and primary care teams in dementia diagnosis and management, and a public awareness and inclusion campaign. A National Dementia Office has been established to drive implementation of the Strategy in the HSE.

I am happy to be able to confirm that my Department has recently secured funding of €1.23 million 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 ensure that people with dementia can live well in their communities for as long as possible.

An evaluation of the Dementia Advisers employed by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland has been commenced by the HSE. It would be appropriate to await the outcome of this evaluation before considering the appointment of additional advisers.

The National Dementia Office has undertaken a project to examine the role of Key Worker for people with dementia, a commitment outlined in the National Dementia Strategy. There are a number of potential models and approaches and the NDO is currently identifying these with a view to determining a suitable approach to this action under the Strategy.

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, including in relation to the role of key worker, 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.

369. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the day care centre in Drogheda Street, Monasterevin, County Kildare, to be open; and the services that will be provided there. [42831/17]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

370. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the HSE's engagement with the introduction of a new in-school speech and language service. [42832/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Programme for a Partnership Government commits that a new in-school speech and language service will be established to support young children as part of a more integrated support system.

The Health Service Executive undertook an extensive review of existing Speech and Language therapy provision earlier this year and the findings and recommendations of that review, which is based on best international practice will inform the development of a new model for delivery.

It has been shown across the OECD as the most effective way of managing and intervening with the educational and social issues consequential to speech and language difficulties in children.

Teachers and SLTs have different, but complementary, skills in developing children's language and learning. SLTs are trained to take a linguistically analytical approach to language while teachers' knowledge and skills relate to literacy, curriculum and teaching practice. These different but complementary skills and knowledge would support the language, literacy, communication and learning needs of students, especially students with or at risk of Speech and Language Complex Needs.

A joint working group, made up of The Department of Health, The Department of Education and Skills, The Health Service Executive and The National Council for Special Education, has been established to develop the proposed model. When finalised, the proposed model will represent a significant change in the way in which services are delivered. Work is currently underway to develop an initial demonstration project with a view to its implementation in 2018.

Question No. 371 answered with Question No. 340.

Question No. 372 answered with Question No. 367.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

373. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the waiting times for children waiting for orthodontic treatment will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42835/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

374. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an appointment at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42840/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider the patient's condition warrants and earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

375. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can be advised of the date of a hip replacement operation in Merlin Park Hospital, Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42844/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Parliamentary Questions

376. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the target response times for Parliamentary Questions that are submitted to the HSE for response; the percentage of responses that are returned to Deputies within this timeframe; if he is satisfied with the quality and detail of the responses that are being provided by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42855/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department consistently answers more Parliamentary Questions than any other. A significant number of these, as they relate to service matters or individual queries are referred to the HSE for answer. Questions referred to the HSE should be answered within 10 working days.

To October 5, this year 9,024 PQs were received by the Department, 6,342 of which were referred to the HSE. 74% of referred PQs have been answered within the 10 working day time frame. I can assure the Deputy that the HSE is aware of its responsibility to provide comprehensive, accurate and timely responses to parliamentary questions.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

377. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when the list of medical conditions that are covered by the long-term illness scheme will be amended (details supplied). [42872/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Prescriptions Charges

378. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 210 of 10 May 2017, the status of legislative change to address the issue of anomalous prescription charge pricing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42879/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is aware of the issues raised by the Deputy and is in contact with the HSE to seek a resolution of the issue.

Mental Health Services

379. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fast track children in care to access CAMHS in a speedier manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42880/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Government is strongly committed to developing all aspects of mental health services envisaged under *A Vision for Change*, and being delivered by the HSE, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Significant progress has been made over recent years, underpinned by additional funding given since 2012 to develop mental health services overall.

HSE CAMHS has standardised operation procedures which supports timely access to services, based on professional clinical assessment and prioritisation, to address the mental health needs of all children presenting to this specialist service. Despite increasing demands overall on CAMHS, irrespective of the source of referrals, individual cases assessed as urgent receive priority. Children in care, therefore, access CAMHS in the same way as other young people assessed as requiring this specialist clinical service.

The development of CAMHS is a priority under the HSE Service Plan 2017. In addition, TUSLA and the HSE published in March last a joint working protocol to support good collabo-

ration and working relationships between both agencies. The protocol governs how children in care access HSE related services, including transition of young people in care to adult services. Minister Zappone and I have recently commenced a joint assessment to see how our respective Departments, in conjunction with the HSE and TUSLA, can further improve inter-agency co-operation in relation to CAMHS.

I will continue to closely monitor progress this initiative, in the context of the agreed priorities for CAMHS set out in the HSE Service Plan for this year, including improved Access and reducing Waiting Lists.

Hospital Services

380. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the processes and services available for children with intestinal failure transitioning from the national paediatric unit at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42887/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that a business case for the establishment of a dedicated centre for Intestinal Failure was prepared by St James's Hospital. Any proposals for the funding for the centre for Intestinal failure in St. James's, including children with intestinal failure transitioning from the national paediatric unit at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, will have to be considered as part of the Hospital Group's overall priorities for services across the Group with regard to competing priorities for resources available in 2018.

Medical Qualifications

381. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the qualifications required for a person to deliver psychological counselling and therapeutic services to young and elderly persons suffering from mental health issues in the private or public sectors [42888/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Palliative Care Facilities

382. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if a submission seeking funding for palliative care rooms within the replacement ward accommodation under phase two of the current developments at Saint Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny has been submitted in conjunction with a charity (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42891/17]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

383. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if the drug eteplirsen is available for persons here; his plans to fund this drug for public patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42892/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

384. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason it takes up to eight weeks for Garda vetting forms to clear for staff waiting to begin working for the HSE; the reason it is not possible for the HSE to apply for Garda vetting online for potential employees in view of the fact that other organisations can do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42916/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

General Practitioner Training

385. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to providing funding to appoint more tutors for the north Dublin area to help maintain general practitioners' commitments to continuous medical education in view of their necessary obligations to remain on the Irish Medical Council register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42918/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): All doctors on the Medical Council's register, including GPs, are required to maintain professional competence by enrolling in professional competence schemes and engaging in maintenance of professional competence activities in relation to their practice.

The HSE provides some support towards this requirement for GPs by funding the GP Continuing Medical Education (CME) National Tutor Network. These Tutors provide teaching to all GPs in active practice to keep them up to date with medical information in relation to general practice.

As this is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

386. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); the communication that the person has received regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42920/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing*

scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Ambulance Service Provision

387. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the level of ambulance cover available each day of the week on a 24- hour basis at each of the ambulance stations across counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42921/17]

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

Home Care Packages Data

388. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with dementia availing of intensive home care packages as of 30 September 2017 by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42937/17]

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.

Emergency Departments

389. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to tackle the expected surge in trolley numbers and the expected overcrowding in accident and emergency departments in the event of winter vomiting bug occurring; and the contingencies in place in this regard [42938/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the distress for patients and their families, and the impact on staff, caused by cramped and overcrowded conditions in some of our hospital Emergency Departments (EDs). ED overcrowding, and long patient waiting times for emergency care, are of critical concern within the health service and tackling this issue remains a key priority for my Department.

In general, demand in EDs reaches a more intense peak during the winter period. Therefore, there is a requirement for winter planning and preparedness to be undertaken, to provide assurance that safe and effective care will be provided over the winter months given the additional anticipatory pressures arising from, for example influenza, norovirus and severe weather.

As such, Hospital Groups, Community Health Organisations and hospitals are all currently in the process of developing integrated winter plans to cover the period October 2017 to March 2018. These plans have been submitted to the HSE for consideration and approval in the coming weeks.

In compliance with the Escalation Directive, all hospitals with EDs have contingency plans in place, to be implemented as required in times of high demand.

My Department continues to work intensively with the HSE to address the challenges, and monitor performance, in our EDs.

Mental Health Services Staff

390. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of members of staff, both medical and clerical, that make up the Child and Adult Mental Health Services team based at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42939/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

391. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for joint replacement operations in the Ireland East Hospital Group in each of the past three years, by hospital; the number of such replacement joint operations carried out in the hospitals; the location in which they were carried out for the same period; if persons were sent to other hospitals outside this region during this period; if so, the locations to which they were sent; the cost of these operations; if a cap on maximum joint replacement operations per annum has been imposed; if so, the reason therefore; the person or body that made the order; the date that it was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42940/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

392. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42943/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Data

393. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if figures are available with regard to the number of persons suffering with Parkinson's disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42944/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 394 withdrawn.

Hospital Deaths

395. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if the CEO of West-North West Hospital Group Saolta has responded to persons (details supplied) on the loss of their baby; if these persons can view their file; when the persons will have the details of the completed review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42950/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I would like to extend my condolences to the family concerned.

With regard to the specific information sought by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

396. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if haemochromatosis will be added to the list of long-term illnesses; and if not, the reason therefore. [42960/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Question No. 397 answered with Question No. 276.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

398. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42974/17]

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

remains committed to ratification of the Convention. Before the State can ratify the Convention however, enactment of new legislation and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland. The previous Government published a Roadmap in October 2015, which sets out the legislative measures needed to meet those requirements, along with declarations and reservations to be entered by Ireland on ratification. Considerable progress has already been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the Convention. The major issue at this stage is in relation to deprivation of liberty – in the case of persons in nursing homes for example, whose capacity to consent may be in doubt. This is a sensitive and important issue and we must get it right. Unfortunately, it is taking longer than expected to develop a proposal that is constitutionally sound and operationally effective and reasonable. This work is being led by the Department of Justice and Equality with the assistance of the Department of Health.

National Children's Hospital Status

399. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the progress on the construction of the national children's hospital, including changes to the overall cost estimates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42981/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the Government's April 2017 decision to give the green light for the new children's hospital project construction investment, detailed discussions with the preferred tenderer and the hundreds of specialists who are part of the construction team were concluded over the summer period. The construction contract for the building of the main children's hospital and the Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centres contract were signed in August. The new children's hospital will be completed by the middle of 2022. The Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly will open in 2019 followed by the second one at Tallaght in 2020 in advance of the opening of the main hospital in 2022. Site preparatory work has continued throughout the year and the construction phase of the project has now commenced with excavation work on the main site underway. The capital cost of the design, build and equipment programme for which the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) is responsible, is €983m, of which €916m is Exchequer capital and €67m is to be funded through commercial and philanthropy sources.

The capital project to build the new children's hospital and satellite centres will only provide buildings. The overall programme to deliver the new Children's Hospital entails both a complex merger of three different voluntary hospitals and a new build. A major programme of work is underway focused on transformative service change to merge three separate hospitals while maintaining existing services, patient safety and quality at three existing sites until transition is complete. On 29 August, the General Scheme for the Children's Health Bill was published on the Department of Health's website. The General Scheme has been referred to the Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health for pre legislative scrutiny. This legislation will create a single statutory entity to run the new children's hospital. The new body will take over the services of the existing three Dublin children's hospitals and run the new children's hospital. The Bill provides for the establishment of a single body to govern and manage paediatric services, as well as to facilitate planning for the transition of staff and services to the outpatient and urgent care centres which will open several years ahead of the new children's hospital opening. It will also support the organisation of the clinical and non-clinical services in an integrated manner across the existing sites before the move to the new facilities.

This new hospital is an extraordinary opportunity to transform paediatric services in Ireland by bringing together patients and staff from across the three existing children's hospitals into

a single organisation as the national tertiary paediatric service with the facilities and necessary status to take on a leadership role nationally in relation to paediatric healthcare and as an international player in paediatric research and innovation.

Generic Drugs Substitution

400. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the publication and implementation of a new national biosimilar policy in view of the fact that the public consultation for same has now closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42994/17]

402. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his views on the introduction of prescribing quotas for biosimilars and-or gain share schemes for hospitals to increase usage of biosimilars, as recommended by leading biosimilar manufacturers; the measures which have been introduced to increase their usage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43000/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 400 and 402 together.

Medicines play a vital role in improving the overall health of Irish patients. Securing access to new and innovative medicines, in a timely manner, is a key objective of the Irish health service. However, the challenge is to deliver this objective in an affordable and sustainable way.

To this end the IPHA Agreement included a specific provision in regards to biosimilar medicines whereby biological medicines receive an automatic reduction of 30% when a biosimilar equivalent comes to the market. The HSE included a savings target of €148m in the National Service Plan 2017 for drug related savings arising from the agreement and the launch of a biosimilar for Embrel in 2016.

The National Biosimilar Medicines Policy will aim to better position Ireland to benefit from current and future biosimilar medicines. The primary objective of the policy will be to increase biosimilar use in Ireland, by creating a robust framework in which biologicals and biosimilars can be safely, cost-effectively and confidently used in the health service.

The public consultation for this policy was closed on 29 September and my officials are currently examining the 30 responses in depth.

Having performed research on international best practice as part of the policy development process, my Department will now begin the developing an appropriate policy framework to increase the usage of biosimilar medicines in Ireland. This will include an examination of the initiatives outlined by the Deputy.

I expect this policy to be published in early 2018.

Generic Drugs Substitution

401. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he has satisfied himself with the level of uptake of biosimilars here; the percentage usage and or market share of each biosimilar available here relative to its biologic equivalent; if not, the reason this data is not tracked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42999/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for the

operation and the administration of the community drug schemes, therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 402 answered with Question No. 400.

Medical Card Administration

403. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if medical card applicants can receive medical cover from the date on which their application was received rather than the date of issue; if not, if he will adopt this change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43009/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medical card cover start from the date the medical card is issued. It should be noted that new applications received for medical card and GP visit card eligibility where the application does not require additional material or information to enable a comprehensive eligibility assessment are processed within 15 working days.

There are no plans at present to change this policy.

Mental Health Services Funding

404. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to invest €55 million for mental health services in budget 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43025/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Mental Health is a priority for this Government. Since 2012, around €140 million has been added to the HSE Mental Health Budget, which now totals over €850 million. This is a significant increase and the *Programme for Partnership Government* gives a clear commitment to further increasing our mental health budget annually, as resources allow, to expand existing services. Further investment in the Mental Health Services will be announced in Budget 2018.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

405. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a review of the illnesses constituted as long-term illnesses; and if not, the reason therefor. [43027/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Home Care Packages

406. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if, in assessing home care packages for persons being discharged from hospitals, there is an assessment carried out of the home situation; if there is a visit to the person's home to assess the help available, the physical conditions of the person's home and the suitability of the person's home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42198/17]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

407. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health when FreeStyle Libre will be made available on the GMS and long-term illness card; if that availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi-daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42206/17]

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.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

408. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to the refusal by the HSE to provide a person diagnosed with narcolepsy after receiving the pandemrix vaccine (details supplied) with a medical card, his views on whether it is appropriate that the HSE is refusing to accept a diagnosis of narcolepsy from an English hospital and is requesting that the person be diagnosed at enormous cost by one of two private Irish medical practitioners who do not hold public clinics; and the steps he will take to remedy this situation [42210/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health, the HSE and the Department of Education and Skills continue to work together to provide a wide range of services and supports for those affected. The HSE's Advocacy Unit acts as liaison with service and support providers and other Government Departments to facilitate access to required services. It is in regular contact with individuals affected. Regional co-ordinators have been appointed to assist individuals by providing advice, information and access to local services.

The ex-gratia health supports include clinical care pathways to ensure access to rapid diagnosis and treatment, multi-disciplinary assessments led by clinical experts, counselling services for both the individuals and their families, discretionary medical cards for those who have been diagnosed have been provided to allow unlimited access to GP care and any prescribed medication, physiotherapy and occupational therapy assessments. Diagnosis of narcolepsy involves a specialised sleep study system which is currently only available in the Mater Private. It is intended that diagnoses will be carried out in the planned Centre of Excellence for Narcolepsy in St James Hospital which has been prioritised by my Department in the 2018 Estimates process. This service will combine a new patient referral system with access to expert consultant and advanced nursing expertise for clinical diagnosis, access to the latest neurophysiological diagnostic techniques with overnight and daytime monitoring for both in-patients and outpatients, laboratory testing, brain imaging and genetic testing. The HSE will continue to pay for access to the services, such as dietician and psychology services, that would have been provided in the Centre of Excellence from private providers to so that none of the affected individuals miss out on receiving these supports.

The Deputy has raised a query regarding an individual case. The HSE has responsibility for the administration of treatment and delivery of services in this case. The matter has therefore been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

409. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not received medical equipment that has been requested by a consultant in St James' hospital. [42211/17]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

410. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have received treatment to date in 2017 under the funding provided to the National Treatment Purchase Fund separately from HSE waiting list initiatives. [42217/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018. Of this 2017 allocation, €15 million has been set aside for the treatment of those patients waiting longest for inpatient and day case procedures.

The first tranche of €5 million was dedicated to a Daycase Waiting List Initiative with a view to ensuring that in excess of 2,000 patients waiting longest for a daycase procedure.

The second tranche of €5 million is being used for an Insourcing Initiative whereby approximately 3,000 patients are receiving inpatient and daycase treatment in a public hospital.

The final €5 million is being used for a second outsourcing initiative in which a further 2,000 patients are currently being scheduled for inpatient and daycase treatment in the private hospital system.

The NTPF has advised that to date 6,906 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its outsourcing initiatives, 2,683 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 1,309 patients have received their procedure so far.

The NTPF has also indicated that 3,161 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under insourcing initiatives, 1,106 offers of treatment have been accepted and 436 patients have been treated so far.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

411. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 535 of 20 September 2017, if his attention has been drawn to the impact that the changes of the prescribing of Lidocaine has had on persons with chronic neuropathic pain; if

the HSE medicines management programme has investigated the impact that changes to the prescription of pain medication has on persons with chronic neuropathic pain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42219/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As outlined in Parliamentary Question No. 535 of 20 September 2017, following a review by the Medicines Management Programme (MMP) of the evidence available to support the use of Versatis 5% medicated plaster, the HSE introduced a system for its reimbursement from 1 September 2017. This process provide for the use of Versatis for symptomatic relief of neuropathic pain associated with previous herpes zoster (shingles) infection, known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), in adults.

All patients who currently use Versatis, for both licensed and unlicensed indications, have been identified and automatically registered on the HSE-PCRS system for three months and will continue to receive the treatment from their pharmacy until 30 November 2017. From 1 December 2017, in line with the MMP clinical review, non-shingles patients will no longer be dispensed Versatis under the community drugs schemes. The HSE has produced patient information leaflets and advised GPs on treatment alternatives.

In exceptional circumstances, the product may be dispensed for unlicensed indications. For example, in the situation outlined by the Deputy and other circumstances, a GP may make an application for reimbursement for unlicensed indications for new and existing patients through the online system. The application will be reviewed by the MMP before a decision is made and communicated to the GP.

Full details of the review of Versatis are available on the HSE website at:

<http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/medicinemanagementprogramme/your-medicines/lidocaine-plaster/lidocaine-medicated-plaster.html>.

As this is a matter for the HSE, I have no role in this decision in relation to individual treatments. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Services for People with Disabilities

412. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a case (details supplied) will be fully assessed in view of the fact it has been awaiting assessment since 8 September 2017. [42220/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Charges

413. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if persons with haemochroma-

tosis are to be charged €80 for outpatient attendance to have their blood drawn off; if so, if this applies just to private patients; if this charge will be imposed on medical card patients also; the justification for imposing fees on this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42221/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Outpatient charges are set by S. I. No. 45/2013 - Health (Out-Patient Charges) Regulations 2013. Currently the only charge for an outpatient service is at an Emergency Department (ED). Medical Card holders are exempt from this ED charge.

The €80 charged referred to by the Deputy is the statutory daily charge, up to a maximum of €800, where a person has been referred to a hospital for an inpatient service, including that provided on a day case basis. Medical card holders are also exempt from this charge. On this basis, where venesection is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an outpatient setting, the public in-patient charge applies. There are no plans at present to exclude haemochromatosis patients from this charge.

Respite Care Grant Applications

414. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if financial assistance will be given to a person (details supplied) to assist with respite care bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42228/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Delays

415. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42243/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Ambulance Service Staff

416. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff who have been recruited by the national ambulance service in regions (details supplied) in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [42245/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Health Services

417. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to the roll-out of the national integrated medical imaging system, NIMIS, the number, name and location of HSE hospitals in which this system has been installed; the number, name and location of HSE hospitals in which this system is in operation; the number, name and location of the HSE hospitals operating under a different system; the provisions within the NIMIS to allow for co-operation within the non-NIMIS, for example, the sharing of images and reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42247/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Both the roll-out and operation of NIMIS are being managed by the Health Service Executive and I have asked them to respond to the Deputy directly.

Respite Care Services Funding

418. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if urgent and emergency funding for existing respite service proposals that are in the possession of the HSE will be provided in view of the respite crisis in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42248/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

419. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a plastic surgery appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42249/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

420. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the medical cannabis compassionate programme; the timeframe for this programme to become more widely used by medical professionals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42250/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, in March 2017, on foot of the conclusions from the Health Products Regulatory Authority's report 'Cannabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review', I established an Expert Reference Group to advise on the development of a Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme.

The Expert Group is chaired by Dr. Mairín Ryan, Director of Health Technology Assessment at the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), and comprises representation from the areas of oncology, palliative care, anaesthesiology, general practice, adult neurology, paediatric neurology, multiple sclerosis, psychiatry, pharmacy, patients, and ethics as well as representatives from HIQA, the HPRA, the National Medicines Information Centre and the Department of Health.

The Expert Group is tasked with the development of clinical guidance for healthcare professionals treating patients through the Access Programme. A critical requirement for the successful establishment of an Access Programme is meaningful engagement with representative bodies, clinicians, patients, and pharmacists so that these groups are integral to the drafting of operational clinical guidance. The Expert Group conducted a targeted consultation on the draft guidance and is due to finalise this guide shortly. The Expert Group are also considering other operational aspects for the implementation of the Access Programme.

Officials in my Department are working on secondary legislation to underpin the programme and on the logistics of sourcing suitable cannabis-based product supplies for the Irish market place. This work will take a number of months to complete.

Pending implementation of the Cannabis Access Programme, and for medical conditions that are not included in the Cannabis Access Programme, under existing legislation it is open to me as Minister to consider granting a licence to an Irish registered medical practitioner, under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, for access to medical cannabis for named patients. The Chief Medical Officer has advised that the granting of such a licence must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Ultimately it is the decision of the clinician, in consultation with their patient, to prescribe or not prescribe a particular treatment for a patient under their care. As Minister for Health I have no role in this clinical decision-making process.

Where a consultant requires information or clarification in relation to the licence application process, he or she should contact my Department directly.

Hospital Procedures

421. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of hip and knee replacements that have taken place in Castlebar hospital, County Mayo in the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42258/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Procedures

422. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of post-operation wash out procedures following knee and hip replacements in the past year in Castlebar hospital, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42259/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Acquired Infections

423. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who contracted the MRSA virus in Castlebar hospital post operation procedures in the hospital in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42261/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Departmental Reports

424. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe to publish an antimicrobial resistance plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42262/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that Ireland's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017-2020 (iNAP) will be published on Wednesday 25 October next. The Plan will be launched by Minister Michael Creed TD and I as the development of iNAP has been a cross-Departmental initiative, requiring a cross sectoral and whole of Government approach to addressing the world wide threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Ireland's first National Action Plan on AMR 2017-2020 was developed following the WHO Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2015 which required all countries to have in place a national action plan by mid-2017 and by the European Commission which also required Member States to develop a national action plan by mid-2017. The Plan has been prepared by both the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), with the guidance of the Interdepartmental AMR Consultative Committee. This ambitious 3-year Plan has been developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and covers the use of antimicrobial medicines in animal health and agriculture, as well as human health - taking a 'One Health' approach to tackling AMR, encompassing all sectors.

iNAP lists Strategic Interventions and Activities, responsible bodies and priority rankings of timelines for implementation. An implementation plan will be developed separately which will address means of tackling AMR as appropriate to each sector. The National Patient Safety Office (NPSO) will discuss arrangements for progressing this body of work with the HSE's HCAI National Lead and relevant others; DAFM are establishing an AMR implementation plan team to oversee its body of work in addressing the interventions and activities listed proper to the agriculture and environment sectors.

iNAP aims to ensure the development and implementation of multifaceted interventions which will safeguard against inappropriate prescribing, dispensing and consumption of medicines, while simultaneously promoting rational use in patients and animals that are expected to benefit from treatment.

Health Promotion

425. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE has cut an information and advice programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42263/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) are totally committed to increasing breast feeding rates in Ireland.

National health policy, including the Healthy Ireland Framework, the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026, the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 and the recently published National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 all emphasise the importance of supporting mothers who breastfeed as well as taking action to increase breastfeeding rates in Ireland.

The recent National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 re-affirmed the commitment to advance public support of breastfeeding, and includes an action to extend provision for breastfeeding breaks under employment legislation (currently available to mothers of children under 6 months).

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Regarding the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) issue, in 2016 the HSE commissioned a research team at TCD to undertake a review of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. One of the key findings of the Review was that there was no difference in breastfeeding rates in hospitals that had achieved the Baby Friendly designation, and those that hadn't achieved designation. In fact, while the Initiative has been in place for 20 years, only 9 of the 19 maternity hospitals have achieved the Baby Friendly designation. This Review highlighted the need for a revised model of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.

Following completion of the Review, the HSE initiated engagement with The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and other stakeholders on developing a revised model. While the HSE has made the decision to pause the existing initiative and it is not being funded for 2017.

The HSE are currently progressing the development of a revised model, working with the National Women and Infants Programme, the HSE Health and Well-being Division, the HSE Lead Midwife and other key stakeholders. The revised model will continue to support the

implementation of the WHO/UNICEF 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, which is the basis of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. The revised model is expected by the end of the year and will be rolled out in 2018.

A wide range of other actions are underway in implementing the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020. These include:

- Improved Governance and health service structures;
- Breastfeeding training and skills development;
- Health service policies and practices;
- Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum; and
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.

Details of specific actions can be seen in the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020 on the HSE website *breastfeeding.ie* and here is the link <https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf>.

Home Help Service Provision

426. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if home help hours will be provided for a person (details supplied); if funding will be provided in order that extra staff and support for home help services in Crumlin will be provided for persons leaving hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42264/17]

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.

Departmental Reports

427. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of a national women's health action plan as committed to in the national strategy for women and girls; the number of persons in his Department working on this action plan; the dates of their meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42271/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The National Strategy for Women and Girls, 2017-2020 (NSWG) was published in April, 2017, and is the framework through which the Government is pursuing actions to advance the rights of women and girls, and to enable their full participation in Irish society.

Implementation is co-ordinated by the Department of Justice and Equality. The Department of Health was represented on the Strategy Committee that developed the NSWG, and is also represented on the Committee overseeing its implementation, which has met on two occasions since the NSWG launch, on 13 July and 26 September, 2017.

The Department of Health is principally involved with implementation of Objective Two of the NSWG; "*Advance the Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing of Women and Girls*".

Action 2.1 of the NSWG commits to "*Strengthen partnership work with the National Wom-*

en's Council of Ireland (NWCI) in identifying and implementing key actions to address the particular physical and mental health needs of women and girls in order to advance the integration of their needs into existing and emerging health strategies, policies and programmes through an action plan for women's health “.

Under this Action, the Department and the HSE will work with the NWCI, and, potentially, additional relevant organisations, including others in receipt of funding from the HSE, such that an advanced partnership approach can be developed to support the implementation of existing actions and needs outlined in the NSWG. Progress on this Action will be supported by the Health and Well-being Programme within the Department and by the Health and Well-being Division within the HSE.

The Healthy Ireland Framework provides the over-arching context for progressing actions with regard to the health and well-being of women and girls. Healthy Ireland takes a whole of Government and whole of society approach to improving health and well-being, with a focus on prevention, reducing health inequalities and keeping people healthier for longer.

Within the context of Healthy Ireland, there are currently a number of issues where improvements in the health and well-being of women and girls could have significant impacts; these are set out in the NSWG.

These include improving awareness and supporting healthier choices in terms of smoking cessation, safer alcohol consumption, improving uptake of the HPV vaccine, increasing physical activity participation rates in younger women and improving rates of folic acid consumption and breastfeeding.

The Healthy Ireland approach is that many organisations have a role to play in achieving the goals of Healthy Ireland and in implementing the various strategies and plans under the Healthy Ireland aegis. Hence, the Department of Health and the HSE will continue to work in partnership with the NWCI and other relevant organisations, to support women and girls in improving their health and well-being. An initial meeting between the HSE and NWCI has been scheduled for early October, in order to progress implementation of these aims.

Lobbying Data

428. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42293/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Minister for Health is a Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015. Information on meetings between Designated Public Officials and lobbyists is available at <https://www.lobbying.ie/>.

The Public Health Alcohol Bill is in the Programme for a Partnership Government and is a priority. It is intended that it pass through both the Dáil and Seanad in this session of the Oireachtas.

Maternal Mortality

429. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of maternal deaths

in hospitals; the age of the women; if they were born here or outside the State, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42299/17]

430. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the availability of interpretative services within the maternity services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42300/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 429 and 430 together.

As the issues raised are operational matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Reform

431. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe to which he is working to establish an implementation office for Sláintecare; when the post of senior executive to lead that office will be advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42301/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, I supported the establishment of the cross-party Committee on the Future of Healthcare and have consistently supported its work. I have welcomed the publication of the Sláintecare report and in particular I have been encouraged by the level of cross party consensus and stakeholder support that it has attracted.

I am committed to making tangible and sustainable improvements in our health services and the Committee's work now provides a framework to do this. I have briefed Government colleagues on the report and I have received approval to move ahead with the establishment of a Sláintecare programme office. This office will be tasked with implementing a programme of reform, as agreed by Government, arising from the Sláintecare Report. It will be led by a senior executive with the appropriate experience and skillset including a strong track record in implementing reform. My Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have sought to ensure that we are positioned to attract candidates of this calibre in what will be one of the largest public service reform processes ever undertaken in this State. It is essential, therefore, that we get this recruitment process right. I expect the recruitment to be advertised very shortly.

In parallel, work is underway to develop a detailed response to the report. The report is wide reaching and it is important that appropriate time is allowed for it to be fully considered and for implementation arrangements to be properly designed. I will report back to Government in December on the work we are doing on translating the Sláintecare Report into a programme of action.

Hospital Staff

432. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made to secure the allocation of two additional advanced nurse practitioners to diabetes services at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42303/17]

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

Health Services Provision

433. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a step down bed at a community hospital will be made available for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal subsequent to discharge from Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42304/17]

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.

Dental Services Provision

434. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if dental treatment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42306/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Services Provision

435. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that if a person does not have a medical card a doctor will not be assigned by the HSE; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that no private general practitioner practices in County Carlow are accepting new persons; and the way in which a person is expected to live and work if they do not have access to basic healthcare, such as a visit to a general practitioner. [42311/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Persons who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card access GP services on a private basis. Details of the numbers of private patients attending particular GPs are not collected by the Department of Health or the HSE.

GPs are private contractors and issues relating to the acceptance of private patients or payment of fees outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the clinician and his/her patients. While I have no role in relation to such matters, I would expect clinicians to consider the importance of patients having access to a GP service close to home when deciding whether or not to accept private patients.

The HSE Primary Care Unit in Community Healthcare Organisation 5 has advised that it has not been made aware of any issues regarding the assignment of private patients to GPs in Co Carlow. I welcome the news that the HSE has recruited a new Open Entry GP in Tullow, County Carlow in recent months, and that this GP commenced seeing patients in his new practice on 14 August 2017. I am also pleased to advise the Deputy that there are no vacant GMS panels in Co Carlow at present.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

436. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if a High Court appeal as set out under section 27 of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 is the only mechanism for a pharmaceutical company to seek reimbursement of a medicine in cir-

cumstances in which the HSE has decided not to reimburse the medicine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42313/17]

437. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish an independent review mechanism to review appeals by pharmaceutical companies in circumstances in which the HSE has decided not to reimburse their medicinal products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42314/17]

438. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the difference in approach taken by Irish and other European assessors of a medicine's clinical and cost effectiveness with regard to treatments for rare disease in circumstances in which certain medicines are readily available in over 22 other European countries but have been refused access here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42315/17]

439. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the role the US Food and Drug Administration has in assessing a medicine for reimbursement here under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; if a conflicting position between the FDA and the European Medicines Authority has a material role in assessing such medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42316/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 436 to 439, inclusive, together.

The assessment process for medicines in Ireland is a statutory process in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 ("the 2013 Act"). Other European countries assess treatments in line with the statutory or administrative approaches in place in their individual country and there is no single model in place across Europe.

The 2013 Act, provides, inter alia, for the establishment and maintenance of a publicly accessible list of all medicines which may be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the various community drugs schemes.

The process and procedures which apply when the HSE receives an application from a manufacturer to add a medicine to the list are also set out in the 2013 Act. Section 18 of the 2013 Act allows a supplier of an item to apply to the HSE requesting the HSE to add the item to the Reimbursement List. The HSE shall determine the application after consulting such experts (if any) as it thinks fit by adding the item to the Reimbursement List or refusing to add the item, the subject of the application to the Reimbursement List.

Section 19(4) of the 2013 Act prohibits the HSE from making a relevant decision under section 18 "except in accordance with the criteria specified in Schedule 3" that apply to the item the subject of the relevant decision.

Schedule 3 sets out the criteria applicable to items and listed items for the purposes of the HSE making a relevant decision under section 18.

Part 3 of schedule 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria:

1. the health needs of the public;
2. the cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services;
3. the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement;
4. the proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically

similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks;

5. the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item;

6. the clinical need for the item or listed item;

7. the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety;

8. the efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies); and

9. the resources available to the HSE.

Section 27 of the 2013 Act allows that a “relevant person aggrieved by a relevant decision may, within 30 days from the date on which the relevant person was given the relevant notification, appeal to the High Court against the relevant decision”.

In legislating for the establishment and maintenance of a Reimbursement List under the 2013 Act, the Oireachtas did not legislate for an alternative independent review mechanism and I have no plans to amend the 2013 Act to provide for the establishment of one at this time.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

440. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with diabetes requiring inpatient treatment for diabetic foot ulceration from County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42319/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

441. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if funding for a further podiatrist in Dublin will be made available in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42320/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply.

Health Services

442. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a sudden increase in persons requiring inpatient treatment for diabetic foot ulceration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42321/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply.

Mobility Allowance

443. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the mobility allowance will be reintroduced for new applicants in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42323/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health and the *Programme for a Partnership Government* acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The next step is to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

Cancer Services Provision

444. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason some supports for women with breast cancer such as breast prosthesis and post mastectomy bras have been reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42329/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

445. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when the new legislation to provide for transport supports for persons with disabilities will be brought before Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42330/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

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- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The next step is to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

General Practitioner Data

446. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners availing of a rural general practitioner allowance by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42331/17]

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

General Practitioner Data

447. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the ratio of general practitioners to population by HSE area, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42332/17]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

448. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he plans to take to eliminate the discrimination against farmers under the fair deal scheme; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42333/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost.

The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, a number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies.

An Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group has been established to progress the recommendations contained in the Review. This Group is chaired by the Department of Health and includes representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, the Revenue Commissioners, and when required, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). These recommendations include examining the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme. The programme for a Partnership Government has also committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms. It is important to remember that the NHSS is largely underpinned by primary legislation and changes to the NHSS will require legislative implementation.

On this basis, I have requested legal advice from the office of the Attorney General regarding potential changes to the legislation that will address this matter. My department has also been cognisant of this matter in the context of this years estimates process. I have recently met with representatives from the I.F.A. to discuss various strategies that may assist with addressing their members concerns and have apprised them of the current progress. We agreed to meet again in the near future for further discussions. I am committed to this review of the position with regard to family farms and small businesses for the purposes of the financial assessment of the scheme and I hope to be able to clarify proposed changes before the end of this year.

Occupational Therapy Staff

449. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists that would be needed to clear the waiting lists of children awaiting assessment of needs and long term plans, by CHO and LHO, in tabular form; and the amount it would cost over the next five years. [42368/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

450. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will support, fund and direct the HSE to develop a rehabilitation ward in empty buildings on the site of Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath in order to allow for the treatment of persons that are clinically

discharged from hospital and still forced to occupy beds due to a blocked pathway for treatment. [42386/17]

451. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will start to fund the ten bed escalation ward that has been operating within Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath for the past number of years in view of the fact this ward is key in order to prevent overcrowding and for the safe delivery of healthcare in County Meath. [42387/17]

452. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he or the HSE plans to close or part close the 24 hour emergency department service in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath in the next 12 months in view of the level of pressure experienced by the hospital network in the region. [42388/17]

453. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath can function safely into the future in view of the fact the conditions in the emergency department have not changed since it was opened in 2015. [42389/17]

454. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to facilitate 24 hour emergency department consultant cover in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath. [42390/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 450 to 454, inclusive, together.

Our Lady's Hospital Navan is part of the Ireland East Hospital Group. Every hospital in that Group, large and small, has a vital role to play within the Group, with smaller hospitals managing routine, urgent or planned care locally and more complex care managed in the larger hospitals.

Currently, the Hospital Group is engaged in a programme of re-design work to further integrate and enhance the role of Navan hospital within the Group and to ensure that it will provide more services safely and appropriately. A key development has been efforts to promote better integration between the Mater and Navan hospitals, in relation to day surgical activity in Navan, with surgeons from the Mater carrying out surgery in Navan. Recent capital investments include upgrade of general theatres and the Sterile Services Unit and refurbishment of the Emergency Department.

The Hospital Redesign Working Group includes representation from local GPs, the National Ambulance Service, the Mater and Navan Hospitals and from the Ireland East Hospital Group. It is intended that the Hospital Group will continue to engage closely with all interested parties to ensure that the needs of patients, staff, the local and wider community are addressed.

I can assure the Deputy that there are no immediate plans to change Emergency Department services at Navan. Any proposed changes to Emergency Department services will only take place after stakeholder consultation in the context of overall service reorganisation in the Hospital Group and will be undertaken in a planned and orderly manner.

In relation to the specific service queries raised by the Deputy I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

455. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment for a per-

son (details supplied) can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42391/17]

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.

Home Care Packages

456. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the level of home care available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42415/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Facilities

457. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding cancelled surgery for persons resulting from repairs being carried out at Merlin Park hospital, Galway; the location to which staff are being deployed; the location to which the ten orthopaedic consultants are being deployed; and the timeframe, locations and waiting lists for priority surgery [42446/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Saolta University Healthcare Group has advised that a leak developed in the roof of a building in the Merlin Park hospital campus that houses the Hospital's two orthopaedic theatres on 4 September. Hospital management temporarily suspended operations for a week to facilitate the Galway University Hospital Buildings and Maintenance Unit to effect repairs.

Following discovery of a second leak on 13 September, a multi-disciplinary team in the Saolta Group, consisting of Hospital Management and Infection Control staff and HSE Estates took the decision to suspend elective orthopaedic surgical services in Merlin Park Hospital. There has been no elective surgical procedures carried out at Merlin Park since that date. Saolta and the University Hospital Galway management team have engaged an external engineering firm to carry out a full assessment of the damage and provide a time-frame for the completion of repairs. Hospital Management advise that they are contacting patients whose procedures have been deferred to explain the situation and assure those patients of the Hospital's commitment to ensuring they are rescheduled in as timely a manner as possible.

On Wednesday 4 October, I met with the Saolta Hospital Group Management, representatives of the consultant orthopaedic surgeons at the Hospital, HSE Acute Hospitals and Estate Divisions as well as local TDs to discuss the next steps in addressing the issue.

The Saolta Group has advised that it is working with the orthopaedic surgeons and staff of

the Hospital and more widely across Galway University Hospitals to implement solutions pending completion of the repairs.

Interim solutions being progressed include: utilising additional bed capacity at University Hospital Galway to enable some further elective procedures to be carried out; engaging with local private hospitals regarding the potential to access theatre capacity to carry out orthopaedic surgery; and engaging the hospitals within the Saolta Group, in other Hospital Groups and the NTPF regarding capacity at other hospitals.

Furthermore, the Saolta Group and HSE Estates are working to progress a mobile theatre unit at Merlin Park Hospital as quickly as possible.

The Saolta Group and HSE have committed to provide a contingency plan that deals service demand.

I acknowledge the upset that this suspension of service has caused the patients affected and their family. The Saolta Group and the HSE have assured me that they are committed to resolving the issue as quickly as possible. I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly regarding service matters such as staff redeployment.

Lobbying Data

458. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the bilateral meetings he has had with his European counterparts and the EU Council and EU Commission presidents since he took office in which he raised specifically the concerns of Irish and European beef farmers that have campaigned for beef not to form part of the potential Mercosur deal, by each European government counterpart, meeting location and date of each meeting, in tabular form. [42812/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I and my Department have been very active in highlighting the potentially very damaging impact of a Mercosur deal on the European and Irish beef sectors.

At political level, I have repeatedly raised the issue with Member State colleagues and with Commissioners Hogan and Malmström, both at AgriFish Council and in other forms. For example, after an intensive campaign led by myself and my French counterpart in early 2016, the European Commission did not include a tariff rate quota for beef in the exchange of offers with Mercosur in May.

Since that time we have remained vigilant and reminded the Commission at every opportunity of the need to closely consult Member States before negotiations are progressed, and to ensure that it takes account of both the findings of its own cumulative impact assessment of November 2016 and the new threat presented by the potential implications of Brexit for an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

France and Ireland have also been active most recently in working with nine other Member States on a joint paper that was submitted to the European Commission on 26 September outlining our shared concerns.

I have also written recently to Commissioner Malmstroem on the matter, and Minister of State Doyle raised the issue with a number of other Member States and with the Commission at the AgriFish Council in Luxembourg on 9 October. The Taoiseach also raised the matter directly with President Juncker at the recent European summit in Estonia recently.

These efforts have been reinforced at official level through similar contacts with Member States and the Commission, including through the Special Committee on Agriculture and the Trade Policy Committee, where Ireland has recently made strong interventions opposing the making of an offer on beef at this time.

I also continue to monitor the situation closely in co-operation with my Government colleagues, including the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and the Taoiseach, and to mobilise support among like minded member states. .

A list of meetings at which I raised the question of Mercosur with European counterparts to date is outlined below, but of course these formal contacts are supplemented by ongoing contacts with other member states and the Commission at official level:

Meeting Name	Date
Agri-Fish Council-Brussels	18/07/2016
Agri-Fish Council-Brussels	14-15/11/2016
Agri-Fish Council-Brussels	23/01/2017
Agri-Fish Council-Brussels	12-13/06/2017
Agri-Fish Council-Brussels	17-18/07/2017
Minister Creed meeting with French Agriculture Minister, Stephane Travert	24/07/2017
Agri-Fish Council-Brussels	09/10/2017

GLAS Payments

459. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive a decision in respect of a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42489/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015.

An inspection was carried out on the holding resulting in a penalty for non compliance with the maintenance requirements for the “low input permanent pasture” and “planting new hedge-row” actions. The person requested a review of the findings of the inspection to the responsible Regional Inspector in the Department who upheld the inspection findings. The person named was notified in writing of the outcome of this review and of their right of appeal to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

460. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if in line with a promise made in the programme for Government the promised €25 million increase for areas of natural constraint (ANC) payments will be made later in 2017; if provision for this will be included in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42551/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. The Programme for a Partnership Government provides for a commitment of a €25 million increase in funding for the Scheme in 2018. This now falls for consideration in the context of discussions on Budget 2018.

Any changes to the ANC would require formal agreement with the EU Commission via a formal amendment of the Rural Development Programme, 2014 - 2020.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19th September and to date, €176 million has been paid to in excess of 81,500 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

Animal Welfare

461. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of calls to his Department's animal welfare helpline in 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42559/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My predecessor, Minister Coveney, established the animal welfare helpline and associated email service in 2012. This helpline facilitates the reporting by members of the public of any suspicion of poor animal welfare or animal cruelty taking place – whether within the realm of a farming situation, a sporting or recreational activity, or indeed in a public place or an urban setting. I think increased public awareness of animal welfare, in conjunction with this confidential means of reporting issues, has proven to be very effective in the expedition of rapid responses to reports of alleged animal welfare issues throughout the country. The helpline streamlines and consolidates the good work in the area of animal welfare already carried out by Department Staff and associated agencies of the state as well as animal welfare organisations and the public as a whole.

For a direct comparison on the figures for 2017 to date, it may be helpful to note that my Department received 512 calls for the period Jan to September inclusive in 2016.

The line is Lo-call 0761 064408 with a dedicated email address of *AnimalWelfare@agriculture.gov.ie*.

The number of calls to the Animal Welfare Helpline for 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017 are as follows:

Year	Number of calls
2015	687
2016	652
2017 to date	526

Animal Slaughtering Data

462. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of horses slaughtered for human consumption in 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of approved equine slaughter establishments in 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42560/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently two establishments approved by my Department to operate as equine slaughter plants under Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin on the hygiene of foodstuffs.

The plants are located in County Kilkenny and County Kildare.

The number of horses slaughtered for human consumption in 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017 are set out in the table below.

No. of equines slaughtered for human consumption 2015 to September 2017.

Year	No.
2015	6033
2016	7618
2017 to date	5837

Animal Welfare

463. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of prosecutions under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, in 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of prosecution files being processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42561/17]

464. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of convictions under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by district; the number of prosecution files being processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42562/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 463 and 464 together.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 has changed the basis upon which animal owners must treat their animals and is specifically designed to allow early intervention in a much wider range of cases than the previous legislation allowed for. Thus minor cases can be tackled before they escalate and the Act is a vehicle to encourage and educate animal keepers. This new approach means that authorised officers are addressing problems while they are relatively minor, reducing the risk of escalation.

Enforcement is a complex issue, so a progressive aspect of the Act is that it does not just focus on prosecution, which is only appropriate in cases where there have been serious welfare issues that can be clearly demonstrated to the courts. The new enforcement approach reflects the need to intervene as early as possible in animal welfare situations. This approach is aided by The Early Warning/Intervention System (EWS) initiative introduced by the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council involving, amongst others, my Department, the Irish Farmers' Association and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals which provides a framework within which farm animal welfare problems can be identified before they become critical or overwhelming.

The Act provides for animal health and welfare notices to be issued by authorised officers. This means that minor situations can be addressed at an early stage and that encouragement, guidance and best practice are introduced rather than just punishment. It also provides for fixed penalty notices to be issued in minor cases and allows authorised officers to seize and re-home animals where the owner's capacity to care for their animals is being overwhelmed. Furthermore the Act contains provisions that where an individual convicted of serious animal welfare offences may be banned by the courts from keeping animals, or indeed have the numbers of animals they may keep restricted.

The provisions of the Act are enforced by authorised officers of my Department, An Garda

Siochana, officers of Customs and Excise and authorised officers of ISPCA and DSPCA, along with individual officers of the Turf Club and Bord na gCon. This approach provides a large cross section of experienced officials whom are aware of welfare issues and can flag them up as and when they arise.

The table sets out the position in respect of cases initiated and prosecuted for the years 2014-16. Ten cases have been initiated in 2017.

An Garda Siochána may initiate cases independently of my Department.

By date of offence

Cases Under AHWA 2013 by County	Initiated - 2014	Prosecuted - 2014	Initiated - 2015	Prosecuted - 2015	Initiated - 2016	Prosecuted
Carlow	1	1	3	1	2	0
Cavan	0	0	3	1	1	0
Clare	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cork	1	1	5	3	3	2
Donegal	1	1	2	0	0	0
Dublin	2	0	2	1	3	1
Galway	0	0	1	0	0	0
Kerry	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kildare	0	0	0	0	1	0
Kilkenny	1	0	0	0	3	0
Laois	1	0	1	0	1	0
Leitrim	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick	0	0	1	0	1	1
Longford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Louth	1	0	0	0	2	2
Mayo	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meath	1	1	7	6	4	2
Monaghan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Offaly	0	0	0	0	1	0
Roscommon	2	2	0	0	1	0
Sligo	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tipperary	0	0	3	2	1	1
Waterford	0	0	1	1	1	1
Westmeath	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wexford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wicklow	1	1	5	3	2	0
Total	12	7	34	18	28	10

Fur Farming

465. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of inspections of mink fur farms in each year since 2012; the number of scheduled inspections; the number of unannounced inspections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42563/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently three mink fur farms operating in Ireland. The number of farms reduced from four to

three in 2014.

Inspections of these farms relating to their licensing and to animal welfare matters are carried out by officers from my Department.

Since 2012 there have been 62 inspections carried out of which 39 have been unannounced, breakdown for each year is as follows:

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
4	18 (12 unannounced)	11 (9 unannounced)	12 (9 unannounced)	12 (9 unannounced)	5 to date

In 2011, a Review Group was established to examine all aspects of fur farming in Ireland. On foot of the Report, that was published in 2012, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on fur farms in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Fur farms are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by Department officials on foot this report.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Expenditure

466. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that of the €25 million announced in December 2016 for the sheep welfare scheme that only €20 million of this has been spent; if additional funding will be granted for an enhanced sheep welfare scheme in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42572/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In December 2016 I introduced The Sheep Welfare Scheme to contribute to the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. The scheme complements the range of other supports available to sheep farmers under schemes such as the Basic Payment Scheme, GLAS, TAMS, Knowledge Transfer and the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

The details of the Sheep Welfare Scheme, including the amount of payment to participants, were approved by the European Commission in 2016. The payment rates are based on the agreed costings underlying the actions to be undertaken in the scheme, and an increase in the funding allocated would thus require changes to the actions currently being undertaken by farmers, or the addition of new actions. Any such changes to the details of the scheme would require the agreement of the European Commission via the formal Rural Development Programme amendment process. Advance payments under the first year of the Sheep Welfare Scheme are due to commence issuing later this year.

Gender Equality

467. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding avenues available to a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42609/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy will be aware, women are taking on a more formal role in agriculture, with increased acknowledgement of their contribution to management and labour input on family farms. They play a major role in farm diversification and their off-farm employment often makes a vital contribution to farm household viability. However, the latest available data indicates that farms with a

sole female farm holder registered on my Department's client database accounted for 13% of farms; 10% of eligible land; and 8% of payments. Only 3.8% of farms are registered in joint female/male names.

A number of clarifications and amendments to the Irish tax code have been driven by my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Finance, to reduce taxation measures acting as a de facto barrier to greater female participation in agriculture, and particularly to registering farms in joint names.

My Department also funds the ACORNS programme to address the skills, enterprise and capability gaps of rural start up female entrepreneurs. ACORNS, financed by my Department's Rural Innovation and Development Fund, is a valuable opportunity to encourage increased farm diversification through mentoring female rural entrepreneurs in a wide range of sectors.

The programme provides participants with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their business goals. Over a hundred women have already graduated from it and many of these past participants have reported increased sales, exports and jobs as a result of the programme. In August I was delighted to announce the launch of year 3 of the ACORNS programme with 56 new places.

I wish to commend the founders of North West Women in Farming Ireland. I am very pleased to see the emergence of "women in agriculture" groups around the country and I hope that the sector will support them.

Tax Code

468. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider a submission (details supplied) and introduce the amendments suggested within the submission as part of budget 2018; if not, the reasons therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42610/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This issue has only recently come to my attention and, as he is primarily responsible for taxation policy, I will raise it with my colleague the Minister for Finance.

Departmental Functions

469. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42772/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Deputy Andrew Doyle was appointed as Minister of State in my Department on 20 June 2017, with special responsibility for Food, Forestry and Horticulture. Minister Doyle's responsibilities include: the implementation of the 2014-2020 Forestry Programme, delivering on the horticulture actions identified in Food Wise 2025, including capital investment for developments in the sector, support for the Organic sector including the delivery of new capital investment for this sector as part of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS II) under the Rural Development Programme. Other responsibilities include the implementation of the Indecon

Report recommendations for the Greyhound sector and exploring the potential for energy crops.

I will shortly be bringing a memo to Government regarding the Delegation of Ministerial Functions to Minister Doyle.

There are no changes to the functions delegated to Minister Doyle relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

470. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if approval will be given to an emergency top up to the areas of natural constraint payment for farmers under severe financial pressure due to incessant rain fall in recent months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42790/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. The Programme for a Partnership Government provides for a commitment of a €25 million increase in funding for the Scheme in 2018. This now falls for consideration in the context of discussions on Budget 2018.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19 September and to date, €176 million has been paid to in excess of 81,500 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

Brexit Documents

471. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on an EU Commission memo in relation to the trading of agri food products on an all Ireland basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42809/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I assume the Deputy is referring to a report, contained in an RTE news bulletin last week, relating to the trade of agri-food products on an all-Ireland basis. The news item referred to a leaked internal Commission document, dating back to last February, which referred to the possibility of agri-food trade being carried out on an all-Ireland basis after Brexit.

The document in question has no official status, and I think should be seen as an internal exploration at that time of possible ideas for dealing with the very serious issues facing the island of Ireland as a result of the UK decision to leave the EU.

The situation has moved on considerably since then. In the interim, the UK has published papers on both the Northern Ireland/Ireland issue and the Future Customs Arrangements, while the Commission has published its paper on Guiding Principles for the Dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland. The Commission document states, inter alia, that “the onus to propose solutions which overcome the challenges created on the island of Ireland by the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union and its decision to leave the customs union and the internal market remains on the United Kingdom”. This is in keeping with the Government’s approach to the matter.

My Department's continued priority for the agri-food sector is to ensure that the EU-UK relationship post-Brexit remains as close to current arrangements as possible, with continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

Greyhound Industry

472. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of doping tests undertaken out of competition at kennels since the introduction of such testing; the number of disqualification orders issued for greyhounds involved in anti doping breaches in each year since 2010, in tabular form; and the number of licences that have been revoked for trainers found to have committed anti doping breaches in each year since 2010, in tabular form. [42818/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Accordingly, the information being requested by the Deputy has been forwarded to Bord na gCon for direct reply.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

473. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has given consideration to top up funding of ANC payments to persons in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Cavan and Longford due to incessant rainfall in these areas in recent months which has caused ongoing financial hardship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42861/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. The Programme for a Partnership Government provides for a commitment of a €25 million increase in funding for the Scheme in 2018. This now falls for consideration in the context of discussions on Budget 2018.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19 September and to date, €176 million has been paid to in excess of 81,500 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

474. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a further review will be carried out on an AEOS 2 scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42865/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The position in relation to the person named is that it is open to them or their representative to submit a request for a further review in relation to the AEOS 2 Scheme, in writing, setting out the grounds on which they wish to request a further review. It is open to them to submit this request including any relevant supporting documentation they may wish to submit to the Regional Inspector for the area not later than 25 October 2017.

Flood Relief Schemes

475. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure that the flood relief scheme for farmers in County Donegal, administered by his Department, compensates persons (details supplied) whose losses are financially devastating and have been assessed by Teagasc. [42924/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Deputy will be aware I visited the Inishowen Peninsula with my Government colleague Minister of State Joe McHugh following the exceptional rainfall of 22 August 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.

In the immediate aftermath of the flood I prioritised the availability of support by means of the Animal Welfare Helpline which includes responding to urgent requirements for emergency feed provision. In addition advice was provided to affected farmers in dealing with the immediate challenges that arose.

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 on Friday 29 September and these will now be processed as quickly as possible.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

476. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 247 of 18 May 2017, if an aquacultural licence will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42926/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application for an aquaculture licence referred to by the Deputy is in respect of a site located in Castlemaine Harbour, which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive (Natura 2000 site).

All applications in 'Natura' areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose

of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. My Department, in conjunction with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is engaged in a comprehensive programme of gathering the necessary baseline data appropriate to the Conservation Objectives of 'Natura' areas. This data collection programme is substantially complete. This is followed by data analysis and the setting of appropriate Conservation Objectives by the NPWS. Once this process is complete all new, renewal and review aquaculture applications can be appropriately assessed for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The Appropriate Assessment of Castlemaine Harbour has been completed and the relevant licensing determinations have been made based on applications to hand at the time of the assessment.

The specific application referred by the Deputy was submitted to my Department subsequent to the carrying out of the Appropriate Assessment process for this harbour. Accordingly, it was not possible to assess this application against the designated Conservation Objectives for the harbour.

The optimum method for appropriately assessing applications by individual operators, who were not included in the initial overall assessment procedure, is under active consideration by my Department. The process must comply with best scientific practice and be achieved in a manner which will be acceptable to the national authorities and to the EU Commission.

In the meantime, the assessment procedures agreed with the EU Commission require Appropriate Assessments in respect of aquaculture activities to be carried out by the national authorities and unilateral departure from these arrangements is not possible.

Every effort is being made to expedite the conclusion of this matter as soon as possible.

GLAS Administration

477. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress in the development of the information technology systems for GLAS payments in view of the fact that there are still a considerable number of persons waiting for payment. [42927/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the context of the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 my Department has delivered over twenty new schemes including GLAS that were supported by IT capability. In relation to GLAS payments my Department has an excellent record in the delivery of high quality ICT systems. We have been consistently among the first to make payments in the EU.

During the 2016 GLAS advance prepayment checking process some information technology issues arose. Substantial work has been done to ensure that the system is well placed to process future payments. 99.5% and 98% of all 2015 and 2016 applicants respectively have been paid their advance.

Currently the biggest delay in paying 2016 GLAS balancing payments is caused by delays in the submission of outstanding Nutrient Management Plans (NMP). The NMP is a core scheme requirement and I urge all GLAS 1 and 2 participants and their Advisors to attend to this urgently so that outstanding balancing payments and future payments can issue and to ensure ongoing participation in the Scheme. As of October 6th just under 7,745 NMPs remained outstanding. Further GLAS 1 and 2 payments cannot issue until a NMP is submitted to the dedicated online NMP system.

Basic Payment Scheme Penalties

478. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the request by a person (details supplied) to have the 20% sanction imposed on their basic payment following an inspection reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42928/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was the subject of a Nitrates inspection on 27 February 2017, carried out by my Department on behalf of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

This inspection identified breaches of the cross-compliance requirements under the Nitrates Regulations relating to the discharge of slurry and soiled water directly into a nearby watercourse. This resulted in an overall penalty of 20% being applied against his 2017 Direct Payments Schemes.

The person named was notified of this decision on 4 April 2017. He has requested a review of this decision and this is currently being examined by the District Inspector. The person named will be notified directly of the outcome of this review as soon as possible.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Departmental Staff Redeployment

479. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of agricultural technical officer appointments which have been made in Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon in 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of agricultural technical officer vacancies in counties Galway, Roscommon and Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42954/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Business needs in my Department's offices in Galway, Roscommon and Mayo are met in the first instance through an internal transfer system whereby serving staff are given the opportunity to transfer to a different work location. Under this system, three Technical Agricultural Officers (TAOs) have moved to the Galway and Roscommon Regional Offices and arrangements are currently in train to transfer further officers to the three Offices. My Department is currently engaged in an extensive recruitment campaign for TAOs, and as soon as new recruits are appointed, the transfer of current serving officers who are seeking to move to Galway, Mayo and Roscommon will proceed. The internal transfer system will facilitate filling of current business needs in these counties, therefore no new recruits have been appointed to these offices to date.

Information and Communications Technology

480. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when information technology issues related to GLAS and AEOS payments will be resolved; the reason for the problems forcing the exacerbation of delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43010/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the context of the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 my Department has delivered over twenty

new schemes that were supported by IT capability. In the first two years of the current RDP programme my Department has already implemented substantially more RDP schemes than were implemented over the entire ten year lifetime of the previous RDP programme.

This rate of delivery and draw-down would not have been possible without the availability of high quality complex IT software systems to support the business units in operating these schemes. Since 2014 my Department has adopted a policy of implementing fully digital end-to-end support for all but the smallest of schemes.

My Department has an excellent record in the delivery of high quality ICT systems. We have been consistently among the first to make payments in the EU.

During the 2016 GLAS advance prepayment checking process some information technology issues arose. Substantial work has been done to ensure that the system is well placed to process future payments.

Currently the biggest delay in paying 2016 GLAS balance payments is caused by the delay by participants in submitting their outstanding Nutrient Management Plans (NMP). The NMP is a core scheme requirement and I urge all GLAS 1 and 2 participants and their Advisors to attend to this urgently so that outstanding balancing payments and future payments can issue and to ensure ongoing participation in the Scheme. As of October 6th just under 7,745 NMPs remained outstanding. Further payments cannot issue until an NMP is submitted to the dedicated online NMP system.

In the case of AEOS payments cases were worked through systematically and paid on a weekly basis as they were finalised. I am happy to announce that all of these cases have now been finalised and that there are no ongoing information technology problems in relation to AEOS.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

481. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the plans he has raised with EU officials regarding the need to protect the current CAP budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43011/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The future of the CAP is an issue of enormous importance for the European and Irish agri-food sectors. The CAP has demonstrated its capacity to evolve effectively in response to changing market, consumer and environmental demands in recent years, to the point where it now plays a central role in delivering the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth sought under the Europe 2020 strategy.

The European Commission has signalled that it will publish its CAP communication on 29 November 2017. However, discussions on the Multi Annual Financial Framework post 2020, which are inextricably linked to the future of CAP, are unlikely to commence now until mid 2018.

There will undoubtedly be pressure on the future CAP budget both as a result of the potential impact of Brexit on future EU budgets and because of emerging issues in areas such as immigration and defence.

My position on this matter has been articulated at official and political level and is well understood by Commissioner Hogan, my European counterparts and in the Commission. I will

continue to work with European counterparts to ensure that the CAP budget post 2020 is well funded and provides a solid and effective foundation for the development of the sector into the future.

Farm Enterprises

482. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he plans to protect the future of suckler and tillage farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43012/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very conscious of the importance of both the suckler and tillage sectors to Ireland's rural economy and the challenges currently facing both sectors.

My Department is providing a number of supports to the suckler herd. The Beef Data and Genomics Programme is the main support for the suckler sector and provides farmers with some €300 million of funding over Rural Development Programme period.

In response to significant demand, earlier this year I reopened the BDGP programme for new entrants, reflecting the success of this programme, which targets both the environmental footprint and the profitability of the suckler herd through improving the genetic merit in participating herds. There are currently 25,669 participants.

There are a number of challenges facing the beef sector including the suckler sector in the short and medium term, particularly exchange rate volatility and Brexit. One of my priorities now is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drink internationally. We are an exporting nation, with 90% of our food produce leaving the island. By further increasing our footprint internationally we can make a contribution to mitigating the effects of Brexit and develop our agri-food sector to realise its full potential.

Live exports also play a vital role in providing an alternative market outlet for Irish farmers, including weanlings from the suckler herd at this time of year. It is an area that I have paid particular attention to since taking up office. Live exports for the year to date are up by over 50,000 head, or 48% compared to 2016.

I remain actively committed to ensuring that Irish beef producers have the option of exporting to as many markets as possible and my Department and state agencies such as Bord Bia continue to work to ensure that any increase from the suckler herd can deliver a viable return to the primary producer and protect the national suckler herd.

Turning to tillage, this is a very important sector, and the Deputy will be aware of a number of measures introduced to underpin the tillage sector and promote its growth into the future.

Among these was a targeted crop loss support measure to assist growers most affected by the wet weather harvest conditions of September 2016.

In addition to the support measure for those worst affected, I also introduced the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme which I specifically extended to include the Tillage and Horticulture sector. I have been advised by the banks that all of the €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers, including tillage farmers, to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance.

As a further support to tillage farmers I also introduced the Tillage Investment Scheme under TAMS II which opened for online applications earlier this year. The second tranche closed on 6 October 2017. There was a significant level of interest in investments under this measure particularly in relation to precision equipment to improve profitability at farm level, with a total number of 490 applications received in the first tranche for the tillage sector alone. 450 approvals have now issued in respect of these and payments and approvals are issuing on an ongoing basis.

Additionally, a range of other supports provide vital income and investment support to both sectors including BPS, ANC, GLAS and TAMS.

Brexit Issues

483. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to protect the Wexford fisheries industry to offset threats posed by Brexit. [43013/17]

484. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure that post Brexit negotiations in relation to fisheries are linked with the wider trade negotiations. [43014/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 483 and 484 together.

Fisheries is, and will remain, a high priority for Ireland in the Brexit negotiations. I am determined to ensure that fisheries remain high on the Brexit agenda in the EU and that the interests of Ireland's fishing communities are fully protected. This, of course, includes communities in Wexford.

I fully agree with the Deputy's assessment in identifying the importance of ensuring that fisheries does not become isolated from the overall negotiations. This will be a key factor in protecting the interests of our fishing industry in the months and years ahead. I am glad to say that Michel Barnier has fully agreed with this assessment and other directly impacted Member States are expressing a similar position.

Existing access arrangements and percentage shares of fish stocks have been agreed by all EU Member States, including the UK, over many years and were most recently affirmed in 2014 when the current Common Fisheries Policy came into force. I see no basis whatsoever for the kind of reordering of the current arrangements apparently sought by some in the UK.

If and when the UK finally leaves the EU they should equally retain their current shares and entitlements. We are not asking that they lose their rights of access to EU waters or face any reductions in their current shares and see no reason why we should lose ours.

As the Deputy will be aware, there has been an enormous amount of work on this issue in terms of analysing potential impacts for our fishing industries under the various possible scenarios since well before the UK referendum. This work has been carried out by my Department, the Marine Institute and BIM in close cooperation with the fishing industry.

At EU level there have been, and will continue to be, regular contacts with the Barnier Task Force, Fisheries Commissioner Vella and like minded Member States at all levels. In all of these contacts I have stressed the importance of a unified EU front, our determination to maintain all of our current rights and the absolute necessity to avoid and separation of fisheries issues from the wider negotiations.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that I will continue to work to have fisheries inextricably linked to the overall negotiations. I will also be unequivocal in opposing any dilution of our existing EU quota shares, including protecting the benefit to Ireland of the Hague Preferences, and any limitations on our existing rights of access.

Budget 2018

485. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if budget 2018 will offer low cost loans for farmers to meet their ongoing capital requirements and on-farm investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43015/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the volatility in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors. I see lower cost finance as an effective way of doing this and we developed the “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI).

The Scheme made €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, allowing them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

The SBCI have recently reported that, to the end of August 2017, there have been 3,920 loan drawdowns amounting to a total of €128,199,316. This is an average loan amount of €32,704. Some 57% of the loans are for terms of 3 years or more. The participating banks have advised that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance.

I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future.

I believe that this Scheme demonstrates the importance of lower cost and more flexible finance as a response to competitive pressures, and I hope that it will be a model for possible future measures.

Budget 2018

486. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if budget 2018 will meet the programme for Government commitment to increase ANC funding by €25 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43017/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. The Programme for a Partnership Government provides for a commitment of a €25 million increase in funding for the Scheme in 2018. This now falls for consideration in the context of discussions on Budget 2018.

There are a number of options in relation to how any additional funding could be allocated under the ANC. These options range from allocating the funds as a flat increase across the current payable rates, to various forms of targeting higher payment rates for particular categories of farmers. Any changes would require formal agreement with the EU Commission via a formal amendment of the Rural Development Programme, 2014 - 2020.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19th September and to date, €176 million has been paid to in excess of 81,500 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

487. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of aquaculture licence applications made for Cruit Island and Carrickfinn in County Donegal; the timeframe for a final decision to be reached on both applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43019/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A number of aquaculture licence applications for the Carrickfinn area have been determined recently and the public notification process provided for in the applicable legislation is ongoing in respect of these applications.

My Department's records also indicate that an application in respect of the Carrickfinn area and an application in respect of Cruit Island are currently under consideration by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

My Department is continuing to examine these applications in accordance with the legislation and full account is being taken of the engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects relevant to the applications.

As the licence applications are under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

488. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason persons (details supplied) have not received an increased payment under the beef genomics scheme in line with the increased number of animals and acreage as a result of a farm partnership; and if he will re-examine the case. [43024/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application to participate in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) was received from the persons named on 25 May 2015. The BDGP was approved by the Commission as an agri-environment scheme under Ireland's RDP. As with all agri-environment schemes payment is made on a per hectare basis.

Under the terms of the Commission approval 2014 was specified as the reference year for the Programme and payment is calculated on the basis of the number of cows that calved in the herd in 2014. In certain very limited circumstances 2015 could be used where 2014 did

not reflect the applicant's usual farming practice, e.g. where there had been a disease outbreak.

The number of calved cows in 2014 was divided by a rate of 1.5 to determine the amount of the maximum payable area (MPA). In order to receive payment in respect of the full MPA the applicant must have had this amount of land declared on the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) application in 2014. While 78 cows calved in this herd in 2014 the amount of land declared on the SPS application amounted to 38 hectares and therefore the MPA for this applicant was established as being 38 hectares. While a farm partnership was entered into in 2016 which resulted in additional land being available under the partnership it is not possible to increase the land over and above that declared in 2014. The reference number and MPA remain constant for the duration of the programme, subject to the land being retained.

It is not possible to increase the reference number or MPA during the lifetime of the BDGP.

Animal Disease Controls

489. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a regulation making it mandatory for a declaration to accompany Connemara ponies put up for sale stating whether the animal has been tested for HWSD or not (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42196/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Hoof Wall Separation Disease (HWSD) is caused by a genetic defect that appears to occur only in the Connemara pony breed and the carrier frequency has been estimated to be about 14.8%. For a foal to be affected by the disease both sire and dam must be carriers.

The Connemara Pony Breeders Society is approved by my Department to maintain the Studbook for the breed and operate the breeding programme.

My Department has allocated funding to the Connemara Pony Breeders Society under the Equine Infrastructures Scheme since 2015 to facilitate testing for the presence of the HWSD gene.

The CPBS has informed me that animals which have been tested for the HWSD gene currently have the results stamped on their passports. Therefore it is envisaged that through highlighting the disease potential buyers will make fully informed decisions when purchasing animals.

My Department is in regular contact with the CPBS and will continue to keep this issue under review.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

490. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase the funding in 2018 for the ANC scheme; his further plans to change the rates of payments for different types of land in line with the constraints on each type of land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42197/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. The Programme for a Partnership Government provides for a commitment of a €25 million increase in fund-

ing for the Scheme in 2018. This now falls for consideration in the context of discussions on Budget 2018.

Any changes to the ANC scheme would require formal agreement with the EU Commission via a formal amendment of the Rural Development Programme, 2014 - 2020.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19th September and to date, over €176 million has been paid to 81,500 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

491. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding 2017 ANC and BPS payments to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42215/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 9 May 2017.

Processing of the ANC application has recently been completed, and payment has issued to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Advance payments under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme will commence, to cleared cases, from 16 October 2017.

GLAS Data

492. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons out of the number of approved applicants to the GLAS schemes 1, 2 and 3 that received the 85% payment and that are awaiting the 15% payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42222/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently almost 37,000 active participants between GLAS 1 and 2 with approximately 13,500 further applicants approved into GLAS 3 meaning that the target set in Ireland's Rural Development Programme has been exceeded.

Despite the scale of the scheme, 99.6% of basic contract payments have been made in respect of 2015. For 2016, 98.4% of advance payments and 73% of balance payments have already been processed. The main reason for outstanding balancing payments is the failure by participants to submit their Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). This is a core scheme requirement.

As of today, there are 7,820 NMPs outstanding for 2016 balance payments. My Department has brought this matter to the attention of GLAS participants and advisors and I would encourage these participants to submit their NMP as soon as possible. This is a matter not just for their 2016 balancing payment but also prevents them from receiving future scheme payments.

GLAS Data

493. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons out of the number of approved applicants to the GLAS schemes 1, 2 and 3 that are still awaiting approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42223/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently almost 37,000 active participants between GLAS 1 and 2 with approximately 13,500 further applicants approved into GLAS 3 meaning that the target set in Ireland's Rural Development Programme has been exceeded.

Despite the scale of the scheme, 99.6% of basic contract payments have been made in respect of 2015. For 2016, 98.4% of advance payments and 73% of balance payments have already been processed. The main reason for outstanding balancing payments is the failure by participants to submit their Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). This is a core scheme requirement.

As of today, there are 7,820 NMPs outstanding for 2016 balance payments. My Department has brought this matter to the attention of GLAS participants and advisors and I would encourage these participants to submit their NMP as soon as possible. This is a matter not just for their 2016 balancing payment but also prevents them from receiving future scheme payments.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

494. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a review in the case of a person (details supplied); and the timeframe for its completion. [42241/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Office has confirmed that a request for a review of the Appeals Officer's decision was submitted to the Director of Agriculture Appeals.

It is anticipated that the review of the case concerned will be completed shortly.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Funding

495. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a €5 million top up to the sheep welfare scheme will be applied from 2018 onwards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42275/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In December 2016 I introduced the Sheep Welfare Scheme to contribute to the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. The Scheme complements the range of other supports available to sheep farmers under schemes such as the Basic Payment Scheme, GLAS, TAMS, Knowledge Transfer and the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

The details of the Sheep Welfare Scheme, including the amount of payment to participants, were approved by the European Commission in 2016. The payment rates are based on the agreed costings underlying the actions to be undertaken in the scheme, and an increase in the funding allocated would thus require changes to the actions currently being undertaken by farm-

ers, or the addition of new actions. Any such changes to the details of the scheme would require the agreement of the European Commission via the formal Rural Development Programme amendment process. Advance payments under the first year of the Sheep Welfare Scheme are due to commence issuing later this year.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

496. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the payments made by his Department for the beef data genomic scheme nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42276/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data & Genomics Programme (BDGP) was introduced in 2015 to build on and expand breeding data gathered under the Beef Data Programme (2013 & 2014) and Beef Genomics Scheme (2014). BDGP is approved under article 28 of Regulation 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. The Programme runs for 6 years from 2015 - 2020.

The objectives of the BDGP are:

- To help lower the intensity of Greenhouse Gas emissions by improving the quality and efficiency of the national beef herd.

- To improve the genetic merit of the national beef herd through the collection of data and genotypes of selected animals which will allow for the application of genomic selection in the beef herd.

Payments under The Beef Data and Genomics Programme for the Programme years 2015 & 2016 have commenced in December 2015 and December 2016 respectively with payments continuing to issue as applicants become compliant.

The BDGP re-launched earlier this year running from 2017 - 2022 with payments for both tranches scheduled to commence in December 2017.

The information requested by the Deputy is outlined below:

2015	Herds	Amount Paid
CARLOW	329	€804,310.68
CAVAN	1,189	€2,013,071.03
CLARE	1,829	€3,383,137.59
CORK	1,727	€3,184,745.82
DONEGAL	1,353	€1,693,718.73
DUBLIN	56	€117,854.95
GALWAY	2,610	€4,250,674.25
KERRY	1,314	€1,948,875.89
KILDARE	308	€756,959.82
KILKENNY	599	€1,615,207.25
LAOIS	592	€1,473,983.09
LEITRIM	923	€1,103,071.63
LIMERICK	801	€1,506,432.24
LONGFORD	631	€1,193,186.50
LOUTH	224	€447,404.56

2015	Herds	Amount Paid
MAYO	2,249	€3,066,812.25
MEATH	577	€1,415,455.07
MONAGHAN	834	€1,310,626.08
OFFALY	587	€1,437,110.72
ROSCOMMON	1,357	€2,249,398.59
SLIGO	937	€1,329,349.32
TIPPERARY	1,001	€2,468,211.46
WATERFORD	358	€1,065,727.83
WESTMEATH	732	€1,661,485.60
WEXFORD	589	€1,563,047.03
WICKLOW	399	€978,423.56
Total	24105	€44,038,281.54

2016	Herds	Amount Paid
CARLOW	306	€757,441.98
CAVAN	1,115	€1,931,567.77
CLARE	1,763	€3,285,312.12
CORK	1,642	€3,075,776.63
DONEGAL	1,281	€1,612,997.46
DUBLIN	55	€119,662.20
GALWAY	2,464	€4,097,548.01
KERRY	1,236	€1,885,610.91
KILDARE	290	€727,676.96
KILKENNY	561	€1,555,795.31
LAOIS	568	€1,438,775.55
LEITRIM	891	€1,078,198.89
LIMERICK	740	€1,429,272.99
LONGFORD	597	€1,163,982.84
LOUTH	212	€427,259.59
MAYO	2,122	€2,968,835.35
MEATH	544	€1,368,780.44
MONAGHAN	787	€1,256,660.28
OFFALY	551	€1,371,763.32
ROSCOMMON	1,287	€2,165,966.78
SLIGO	904	€1,295,637.51
TIPPERARY	950	€2,385,464.29
WATERFORD	337	€1,019,400.06
WESTMEATH	680	€1,570,993.61
WEXFORD	548	€1,482,552.46
WICKLOW	371	€919,251.29
Total	22802	€42,392,184.60

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

497. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has given consideration to reinstating the ANC payment to 2008 levels to better support farmers that work in the most difficult conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42278/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Rural Development Regulation each Member State may designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. In 2015 the ANC scheme replaced the Disadvantages Areas Scheme (DAS). Current payments are based on a range of socio-economic factors and are made on three separate land designations.

The Rural Development Regulation also sets out that, in future, all eligible disadvantaged areas must be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria such as soil moisture, soil drainage, soil texture, slope. My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on sourcing and analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. This analysis will identify areas deemed to be facing natural constraints, which will in parallel be subjected to a refinement process. The timing for the introduction of this new designation is dependent on the outcome of current discussions at EU level in relation to the ‘Omnibus Proposal.’

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase the budget for the Scheme by €25m in Budget 2018. This commitment will be considered via the annual budgetary process and my Department is committed to ensuring that all available funds under the scheme are targeted in the most effective manner.

Lobbying Data

498. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42283/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015, persons who fall within the scope of the Act who communicate with Designated Public Officials about relevant matters must register and submit returns of lobbying activity.

Details of the lobbying activity referred to by the Deputy can be accessed on the Register of Lobbying maintained under the Act by the Standards in Public Office Commission on www.lobbying.ie.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

499. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to restore areas of natural constraint payments to 2008 levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42353/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Rural Development Regulation each Member State may designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. In 2015 the ANC scheme replaced the Disadvantages Areas Scheme (DAS). Current payments are based on a range of socio-economic factors and are made on three separate land designations.

The Rural Development Regulation also sets out that, in future, all eligible disadvantaged areas must be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria such as soil moisture, soil drain-

age, soil texture, slope. My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on sourcing and analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. This analysis will identify areas deemed to be facing natural constraints, which will in parallel be subjected to a refinement process. The timing for the introduction of this new designation is dependent on the outcome of current discussions at EU level in relation to the ‘Omnibus Proposal.’

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase the budget for the Scheme by €25m in Budget 2018. This commitment will be considered via the annual budgetary process and my Department is committed to ensuring that all available funds under the scheme are targeted in the most effective manner.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Funding

500. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an additional €5 million funding for the sheep welfare scheme will be provided in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42355/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In December 2016 I introduced The Sheep Welfare Scheme to contribute to the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. The Scheme complements the range of other supports available to sheep farmers under schemes such as the Basic Payment Scheme, GLAS, TAMS, Knowledge Transfer and the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

The details of the Sheep Welfare Scheme, including the amount of payment to participants, were approved by the European Commission in 2016. The payment rates are based on the agreed costings underlying the actions to be undertaken in the scheme, and an increase in the funding allocated would thus require changes to the actions currently being undertaken by farmers, or the addition of new actions. Any such changes to the details of the scheme would require the agreement of the European Commission via the formal Rural Development Programme amendment process. Advance payments under the first year of the Sheep Welfare Scheme are due to commence issuing later this year.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

501. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to raise the suckler cow payment in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42356/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is the current main support for the suckler sector and makes provision for some €300 million of funding over the next six years to Irish beef farmers.

I will continue to support this programme through the lifetime of the current RDP. Any increase in the payment under the BDGP would require approval from the EU Commission. This would be very difficult in the context of an innovative scheme which has undergone an approval process relatively recently. Even in the event that such approval was obtained, it would be necessary to require farmers to undertake additional actions to justify any additional payment, making the scheme more complex and compliance more onerous.

I have already in 2017, reopened the BDGP to beef suckler farmers who were not already

part of the scheme. The scheme (BDGP II) also provides for six years of payments to farmers for actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability. There are currently 25,669 participants in BDGP I and BDGP II.

Payment rates and actions for participants in BDGP II are the same as those in the original scheme, with the exception that the training and carbon navigator actions must be completed by 31 October 2017. Explicit provision has been made for new entrants. I should also point out there a range of other supports available to suckler farmers under the RDP, notably GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer groups.

Dairy Sector

502. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he plans to take to protect farmers from price volatility in the dairy sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42357/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is no doubt aware, the ending of the milk quota regime represented an exceptional opportunity for the dairy industry to increase milk output and reach the 50% target set out in Food Harvest 2020. In tandem with opportunity, challenges such as volatility must be faced.

The period between mid-2014 through to Q4 2016 was extremely challenging for the dairy sector. Factors contributing to global price volatility in 2015 and 2016 included the Russian Ban and the softening of Chinese demand on one side, coupled with increased production among key global producers including the EU on the supply side.

While the outlook in 2017 has been more positive, there are a number of factors which continue to contribute to price volatility in the sector, including political factors outside our control. Notwithstanding challenges on the horizon, amongst which Brexit is paramount, stakeholders in the Irish dairy sector are well placed to benefit from expanding global demand.

In terms of market returns to primary producers, raw milk prices remain in the region of 35 to 36 cents per litre which is ahead of the EU average and over 50% ahead of where prices were this time last year. Peak production months have passed in Ireland and by end September circa 80% plus of the average dairy farmer's annual production has been completed. This combination of good prices and stronger supply means that 2017 can be expected to be a very good year for Irish dairy farmers in terms of market returns for their raw milk, which is welcome in the context of a very difficult 2016 in particular.

I remain conscious of the pressure volatility in dairy markets can exert on farmers and I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to utilising measures at our disposal, including EU market measures such as intervention, aids to private storage and exceptional market measures, as necessary. The legislative provisions underpinning these measures were finalised during the Irish Presidency of the European Union in 2013.

I have already outlined the measures taken to assist Irish farmers, including dairy farmers, on a number of occasions. These include the launch of a €150 million low-cost Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme, increased funding under the Rural Development Programme, as well as the allocation of additional €6.75 million to Bord Bia to provide supports to companies in terms of diversification of markets. My Department continues to support and fund initiatives that help Irish farmers verify the high standards and quality of their production, including Origin Green and the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme.

In recent years dairy markets have been characterised by periods of both high and low prices and the challenge is to ensure that farmers have the tools available to manage their enterprises through the more difficult periods. The industry itself has a critically important role to play and I welcome initiatives such as fixed price and margin contracts, which offer producers stability for a proportion of their supplies of milk going forward. In our taxation policy, we have made it possible for farmers to average their income over a period of five years.

I will continue to carefully monitor market developments and engage with the EU Commission, with other member states and with industry stakeholders to ensure that measures are in place to help farmers through periods of uncertainty and volatility.

I recently hosted the fifth meeting of the Dairy Forum with key stakeholders from the Irish dairy sector to discuss how best to future proof the sector by formulating a cohesive approach to dealing with ongoing challenges.

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work closely with the dairy sector, with EU colleagues and International counterparts to ensure the development and maintenance of a sustainable dairy sector in Ireland.

TAMS Funding

503. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase funding for TAMS and increase investment aid for commercial horticulture in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42358/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The budget allocation for TAMS II for 2018 will be confirmed later today.

Under the TAMS II scheme, support is provided under a suite of seven measures:

- Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme;
- Dairy Equipment Scheme;
- Organic Capital Investment Scheme;
- Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme;
- Low Emission Slurry Spreading;
- Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme;
- Tillage Capital Investment Scheme.

A wide range of investment items are available under each of these measures to help Irish farmers to improve their farms.

The scheme is co-funded by the National Exchequer and the EU's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development under Ireland's Rural Development Programme. The total allocation for the TAMS II Scheme in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Plan is €395m.

The online payment claim system for TAMS II opened in July 2016. Payment claims for approved investments continue to be submitted to this system and processed for payment. These claims were received and processed at an average rate of €1m per week in the past few weeks following the busy construction period over the summer months.

To date 11,400 approvals have issued since the Schemes were launched in 2015 with an estimated commitment value of €172m. Payments amounting to over €24.2m have issued in respect of 1,762 payment claims received from the approved applicants. The total number of payment claims received to date is over 2,300. This means that there are 9,000 approvals out there with farmers under this scheme where payment applications have not been received by my Department. It is only when these applications are received that we can make payments. I would strongly urge all approved participants in the Scheme who have completed their approved works to submit their payment claims to the online system so that payments can issue without delay.

My Department has contributed significantly to the support of the Horticulture sector through its grant aid Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector. In 2016, €3.85 million in grant aid was paid to horticultural growers. The grant aid paid supported some €9.7 million in investment by these growers.

Under the 2017 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector, the budget is €5 million. Payments under this scheme are being made as early as possible, so as to try to alleviate any financial pressure that growers are currently facing.

The scheme assists capital investments on farms to promote the specialisation and diversification of on-farm activities, improve the quality of products and facilitate environmentally friendly practices and improve working conditions on farms. The scheme has made an immense contribution to the growth and development of the horticulture sector across all areas – protected crops, field vegetables, nursery crops, mushrooms, soft fruit, apples and beekeeping.

To ensure ongoing support for the sector, my Department has extended, under EU sanction, the Scheme to run until 31 December 2019.

The EU Producer Organisation Scheme is also a vital support for horticultural growers. This scheme provides an important mechanism for growers to achieve greater bargaining power in the marketplace by becoming part of a larger supply base. Between 2005 and 2016, a total of €44.6 million was paid to producer organisations as part of the EU Producer Organisation scheme.

Land Acquisition

504. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to provide funding to the NPWS to compensate farmers that have their lands designated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42359/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to clarify that my Department has no role in the designation of lands. That function is exercised through the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The question of compensation does not arise, therefore, in the context of any schemes or measures introduced by my Department. That is entirely a matter for the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to decide upon, as is the provision of funds for any such purpose. My Department does not fund the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

That said, many of these designations are for species or habitats whose conservation is encouraged under various schemes operated by my Department, such as GLAS, the Burren Programme or some of the newer locally-led schemes being rolled out at present like the Hen Harrier Scheme. Farmers in these areas have an opportunity to avail of a range of support packages under these schemes which can provide an important additional income stream for those

affected.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme Administration

505. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to make low cost loans available for farming enterprises over a five-year period to fund both ongoing working capital requirements and on-farm investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42361/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the volatility in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors. I see lower cost finance as an effective way of doing this and we developed the “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI).

The Scheme made €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, allowing them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

The SBCI have recently reported that, to the end of August 2017, there have been 3,920 loan drawdowns amounting to a total of €128,199,316. This is an average loan amount of €32,704. Some 57% of the loans are for terms of 3 years or more. The participating banks have advised that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance.

I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agrifood sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future.

I believe that this Scheme demonstrates the importance of lower cost and more flexible finance as a response to competitive pressures, and I hope that it will be a model for possible future measures.

Food Harvest 2020 Strategy

506. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the latest data with regard to progress on attaining baseline targets set down for the agrifood sector and in each sector in which data is available in the Food Harvest 2020 strategy, by new jobs to be created, primary output, export levels and value added in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42442/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of primary output by 33% and agrifood exports by 40% (both from a 2007-09 average baseline); and to increase value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline). In addition to these value increases, the dairy industry targeted a 50% increase in milk production by 2020, to be progressed following the abolition of milk quotas in April 2016.

Progress on those targets is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The latest data available show growth of 36% for both primary production and exports (based on 2016 data), and 47% for value added (latest available data 2014), versus the baseline period, demonstrating excellent progress.

Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agrifood sector published in July 2015, is the successor to the Food Harvest strategy. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agrifood exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agrifood sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development. Realising these growth projections will be challenging, but I am confident that they can be achieved.

In July this year, I launched the second annual progress report of Food Wise 2025: Steps to Success 2017. Food Wise Steps to Success showed that, of the 368 detailed actions which were due to commence by 2017 or are on-going actions; 46% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 49% have commenced and are progressing well. This shows good progress but I will press on in getting as many actions as possible complete within the next year.

Agriculture Scheme Data

507. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications to the 2017 national reserve and young farmers scheme, by county, in tabular form. [42443/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of applications received under the 2017 National Reserve and the 2017 Young Farmers Scheme, by county, is set out in the following table:

County	2017 National Reserve applications	2017 Young Farmers Scheme applications
Carlow	21	148
Cavan	74	400
Clare	56	398
Cork	149	1118
Donegal	50	421
Dublin	6	42
Galway	140	846
Kerry	90	533
Kildare	23	147
Kilkenny	43	336
Laois	42	299
Leitrim	43	260

County	2017 National Reserve applications	2017 Young Farmers Scheme applications
Limerick	56	384
Longford	19	154
Louth	13	99
Mayo	87	757
Meath	42	270
Monaghan	18	246
Offaly	42	267
Roscommon	54	373
Sligo	55	236
Tipperary	86	545
Waterford	34	260
Westmeath	27	199
Wexford	42	390
Wicklow	27	174

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme Administration

508. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to provide for the introduction of low cost loans for farming enterprises to fund both ongoing working capital requirements and on farm investment in budget 2018 [41667/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the volatility in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors. I see lower cost finance as an effective way of doing this and we developed the “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI).

The Scheme made €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, allowing them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

The SBCI have recently reported that, to the end of August 2017, there have been 3,920 loan drawdowns amounting to a total of €128,199,316. This is an average loan amount of €32,704. Some 57% of the loans are for terms of 3 years or more. The participating banks have advised that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance.

I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agrifood sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future.

I believe that this Scheme demonstrates the importance of lower cost and more flexible finance as a response to competitive pressures, and I hope that it will be a model for possible future measures.

509. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has commissioned continuous surveys of air pollution levels in Dublin and other cities to monitor the health effects of diesel fuel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42666/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the 2008 Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (Directive 2008/50/EC) and the Fourth Daughter Directive (Directive 2004/107/EC of 15 December 2004). These Directives also include rules on how Member States should monitor, assess and manage ambient air quality. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is tasked with co-ordinating and managing the monitoring programme.

Under the Directives, EU Member States must designate “Zones” for the purpose of managing air quality. For Ireland, four zones were defined in the Air Quality Standards Regulations, 2011. The zones in place in Ireland in 2017 are Zone A: the Dublin conurbation, Zone B: the Cork conurbation, Zone C: comprising 23 large towns in Ireland with a population of more than 15,000, and Zone D: the remaining area of Ireland.

Ireland currently has a nationwide network of 30 monitoring stations which measure levels of air pollutants in the four zones. This information is delivered to the public in near real-time at www.airquality.epa.ie. The numbers and locations of the monitoring equipment for each pollutant are determined by the requirements of the Directives for ambient air monitoring in each zone. Currently Dublin has 14 monitoring stations.

The Agency’s most recent annual air quality report was published in November 2016 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2015. While the EPA does not disaggregate diesel emissions from other pollutant sources, emissions of NO₂, a significant pollutant arising from diesel use, were monitored at 15 locations across Ireland for the 2015 report. Values for all these sites were below the EU annual limit value. The report cautions however that NO₂ values may increase in line with growth in economic activity in the State.

Following a comprehensive review of the current status of ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland, the EPA has developed a new national Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) under Section 65 of the EPA Act. My Department will provide the required funding to the Agency for this development, which will significantly strengthen the capacity and capability of the monitoring network to provide more comprehensive, localised air quality information linked to public health advice.

Waste Management

510. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the recent call by a person (details supplied) for local authorities to take back control of waste management by replacing the system of multiple operators competing against each other with a publicly run tendering system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42929/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There are no proposals currently to alter the structure of the household waste market. *A Resource Opportunity – Waste Management Policy In Ireland* (2012) commits to retaining the current market structure while strengthening the regulatory regime applied to household waste collection.

Legislative Programme

511. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the geothermal energy development Bill; when it is likely to be advanced further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42522/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): There is currently no legal framework for the regulation of geothermal energy in Ireland. The purpose of the Geothermal Energy Bill is to provide a legislative framework for the vesting, licensing and regulation of the development of geothermal energy. The Geothermal Energy Bill will define geothermal energy in line with the standard European definition (“energy stored in the form of heat beneath solid earth”) as set out in Directive 2009/28/EC on renewable energy. It will vest ownership of geothermal energy in the State, giving practical effect to the assertion of State ownership of natural resources in Article 10.1 of the Irish Constitution.

Draft Heads of Bill were originally completed in July 2010 and approved by the Government for referral to the Attorney General and the Parliamentary Counsel for detailed drafting. The Department has had ongoing discussions and consultation with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel since then, and significant progress has been made on the drafting of the Bill. There are currently over 150 sections in the draft Bill.

Many of the provisions of the Geothermal Energy Bill were based on aspects of the Minerals Development Bill, particularly in the areas of exploration and licensing. The Minerals Development Act 2017 was enacted on 26 July 2017. Once the secondary legislation and commencement of the Minerals Development Act 2017 is finalised, the drafting process for the Geothermal Energy Bill will recommence. The expected time for this is 2018, with publication of the Geothermal Energy Bill envisaged for the second half of 2018.

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

512. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the costs associated with the rebranding of the Commission for Energy Regulation to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities including logo design, websites and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42554/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is an independent regulator established under the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999. The name change was provided for in the Energy Act 2016 to reflect the expanded powers and functions of the Regulator. The matter raised is an operational matter for CRU and not one in which I, as Minister, have any function.

Post Office Closures

513. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has met with an organisation (details supplied) and An Post in view of media reports that some 400 rural post offices could be set to close. [42576/17]

514. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has seen the reported An Post blueprint which sets out plans for post office

closures; if he will request An Post to publish these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42577/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 513 and 514 together.

As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I am responsible for the postal sector including the governance of An Post. Operational matters relating to the company's retail business, including the post office network, are matters for the Board and management of An Post.

An Post is carrying out a fundamental review of the company to identify the strategic changes and restructuring necessary to put the company on a sound financial footing. In this context, An Post is looking at the future of the post office network as it is imperative that it be restructured into a viable, sustainable, modern network for the future capable of adapting to the changing environment in which it operates. Any changes in this area will have to be the subject of negotiation between An Post and the Postmasters. I continue to encourage An Post to work closely with all parties to find an agreed solution to the renewal of the network.

I have not seen the document referred to by the Deputy. I appreciate that there is concern regarding the potential closure of post offices and the potential number involved. However, I am advised that no definitive decision has been made by An Post regarding post office closures.

I can confirm that I had a constructive meeting with the Irish Postmasters' Union on 5 October 2017 and I was interested to hear their perspective on how to sustain the network for the future.

Until such time as the strategic review is finalised and assessed it is not possible to comment further. Government will be briefed once a definitive strategy has been agreed.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

515. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out to all businesses and households in Glaslough, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42592/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband and this footprint is expanding. By 2020, 90% of premises in Ireland will have access high speed broadband.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode by individuals who are seeking information.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.
- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will re-

quire State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map shows that of the approximately 60 premises in the townland of Glaslough, 99% fall within the LIGHT BLUE area covered by eir's planned deployment to deliver high speed broadband between now and the end of 2018. More information on eir's roll-out can be found on eir's website on *www.fibrerollout.ie*. The remaining 1% of premises fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

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 process was reached in September with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage 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 roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area I established, in July 2016, a Task force to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for roll-out and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the NBP State led intervention.

Under this Task force, 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 is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Mobile Telephony Services

516. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of investigations under way that fall under breaches of the Wireless and Telegraphy Acts that relate to poor mobile phone coverage and or poor or reduced broadband speeds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42598/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have no role or statutory function in the matter raised by the Deputy. The provision of mobile telecommunications services is subject to a requirement to secure a wireless telegraphy licence to access the required radio spectrum. The award of such licences, including the application of qualifying terms and conditions such as quality of service and coverage obligations, and the associated monitoring of compliance by licensed providers with those terms and conditions is a matter for the independent Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

Given that ComReg is statutorily independent in the performance of its functions, I have sent the Deputy's query to ComReg and I have asked it to reply directly to the Deputy.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

517. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the production of electricity by renewable energy sources in megawatts here; the level of megawatts required to meet the 40% target of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42653/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) have estimated the breakdown of the production of electricity from renewable sources at end 2016 as follows:

Renewable Technology	Installed capacity (MW) at end 2016
Hydro	237
Wind	2,827
Municipal Waste	22
Solid biofuels	5
Biogases	53
Solar	6
Total	3,150

Most recent provisional data from the SEAI indicates that 27.2% of electricity, 6.8% of heat and 5.0% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2016. Overall, SEAI analysis shows that 9.5% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2016 were met from renewable sources.

At September 2017, the total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid was 3,400 MW approximately of which 3,080 MW was wind generation. A breakdown of the other renewable technologies is not currently available. 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.

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 designed to encourage further investment in renewable electricity. 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.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Eligibility

518. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to alter the criteria for the better energy homes scheme to allow for homes that were built and habitable in 2006 and 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42704/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Homes Programme, administered by the Sustainable Energy

Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department, provides fixed grants for a range of energy efficiency measures including roof insulation, wall insulation, heating controls, boiler upgrades, solar heating systems and the cost of Building Energy Rating assessments. Since the programme's launch in 2009, it has provided grant assistance to more than 200,000 households.

To be eligible for the scheme a home must have been constructed before 2006. Dwellings constructed from 2006 onwards were subject to Building Regulations transposing the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). These regulations require all new homes to meet certain energy efficiency standards. These standards include limiting the CO₂ emissions associated with energy use, limiting heat loss through the fabric of the building, controlling the output of the space heating, hot water systems and limiting the heat loss from pipes, ducts and vessels used for the transport or storage of heated water or air. Therefore, homes constructed in accordance with this legislation do not require the type of upgrades supported by the Better Energy Programme.

Fisheries Protection

519. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has secured the necessary funding to introduce a hardship fund for eel fishermen that have experienced severe hardship since the eel fishing ban was introduced. [42723/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Consideration is being given to the possibility of support measures for eel fishermen within the 2018 Estimates process. However, such consideration will be against the background of competing requirements from all Departments as part of the Estimates process.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

520. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a property (details supplied) will receive high speed broadband; the expected timeframe for the rollout to begin; the timeframe for it to be completed; if his attention has been drawn to deficits in particular areas of the country such as the area in question; if he will request a company (details supplied) to extend its plans for fibre roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42728/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode by individuals seeking information.

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 eircode referenced is within the AMBER area and will be covered by the State intervention under the NBP.

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 on 26 September 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 roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a Task force to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers.

Under this Task force, 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 is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department’s website.

Broadband Service Provision

521. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the frustration for many households in County Donegal that end up on the national broadband plan despite the fact that their home or premises is located across the street from commercial roll-out routes; when broadband will be rolled out to an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42730/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government’s National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode by individuals seeking information.

- 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 eircode referenced is within the AMBER area and will be covered by the State interven-

tion under the NBP.

The map shows that there are over 101,000 premises in County Donegal, about 68,000 of which fall within a BLUE area of the Map and will be covered by commercial operators. Just over 16,500 of these 68,000 premises form part of eir's planned rural deployment to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and the end of 2018. The remaining 33,000 premises in County Donegal fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan. With regard to the eir fibre to the home roll-out close to the referenced premises, the decision as to what areas and premises are served is a matter for eir and not one in which I have a role.

With regard to the State Intervention, my Department is engaged in an ongoing 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 in September 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 roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established, in July 2016, a Task force to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for roll-out and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the NBP State led intervention.

Under this Task force, 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 is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Ministerial Functions

522. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42775/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There is one Minister of State attached to my Department. I have delegated powers to Minister of State, Seán Kyne T.D. under Statutory Instrument No.34 of 2017, Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017. The order was approved by Government on 11 July 2017.

The designated functions in question relate to:

- the Natural Resources area including Mineral and Petroleum Exploration Production and Mining,
- Inland Fisheries and
- the Geological Survey of Ireland.

In respect of changes in powers which were delegated prior to 14 June 2017, additional responsibilities relating to Digital Development have been assigned to Minister of State Kyne but do not involve any statutory functions.

National Broadband Plan Data

523. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of houses in County Donegal that have been connected to high speed broadband by the end of July 2017; the number of households that will be connected by the end of 2018; his plans for connecting all other households in County Donegal; the time-frame for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42857/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location, where providers acting alone will not provide this essential service. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband. This footprint is continuing to expand and it is expected to rise to 77% by the end of 2018. By 2020, 90% of premises in Ireland will have access high speed broadband.

In April, eir signed a Commitment Agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period; decisions as to when areas and premises are served, is an operational matter for eir. A copy of the Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are also published on my Department's website. eir has confirmed to my Department that 100,000 premises have been passed as at the end of September 2017. The 300,000 figure includes 25,586 premises in County Donegal. eir has passed 9,075 premises in the county to date. eir will continue to rollout high speed broadband to the remaining 16,511 premises as part of this Agreement between now and the end of 2018. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map finalises the State Intervention Area for the procurement process and is an important milestone in the procurement process. The Map shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services. The Map, which is searchable by address or eircode, will be updated to show quarterly progress of the eir roll-out.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map shows that there are over 101,000 premises in County Donegal of which about 68,000 premises including the aforementioned 16,511 premises that form part of eir's planned commercial rural deployment, fall within a BLUE area of the Map and will be covered by commercial operators. The remaining c.33,000 premises in County Donegal fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

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 process was reached in September with the submission of “Detailed Solutions” by two bidders, This is the last stage 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 roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area I established, in July 2016, a Task force to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for roll-out and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the NBP State led intervention.

Under this Task force, 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 is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department’s website.

Mobile Telephony Services

524. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the outcome of discussions he has had with the telecommunications regulator and the telecommunications providers regarding the inadequate mobile telephone coverage in County Donegal; his plans to deal with the substandard service available in County Donegal at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42858/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The provision of telecommunications services, including mobile phone 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 statutory authority to require commercial companies to roll-out services to particular locations.

Any customer across Ireland who experiences service difficulties, including those in County Donegal, 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.

However, 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 Taskforce. In July 2016, I established the Taskforce 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 Taskforce 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 and has met twice this year, in March and July, with another meeting due to take place in the coming weeks. 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.

This engagement was clearly demonstrated last Friday in Athlone where myself and Minister Kyne jointly hosted the first National Stakeholder Forum. This Forum arose out of a recognition by the Taskforce that, given the rapid pace of technology and the emergence of new equipment and solutions to deliver telecommunications services, it was critical that an opportunity be afforded to stakeholders to raise concerns on impediments to the rollout of services. At last week's Forum, the opportunity was taken not only to discuss the issues impacting on such rollout, but also to suggest new recommended actions to the Taskforce that will assist in providing improved services to consumers and in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place. The Forum will also inform the review to be conducted prior to completion of an annual report by the Implementation Group for end 2017.

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.

Post Office Network

525. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on reports in the media (details supplied) which report 400 post office closures throughout the country; his plans regarding same; if an assurance can be given to postmasters on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42234/17]

528. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the outstanding recommendations of the post office network business development group; the estimated cost of implementing all recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42337/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 525 and 528 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No 22 of 4 October and to the topical issues debate on post offices in the House on the same date.

It is Government policy that An Post remains a strong, viable company in a position to provide a high quality, nationwide postal service and that it maintains a nationwide customer-focused network of post offices in the community. However, the An Post Group lost €13.7 million in 2016 with the core mails business losing over €30m. An Post has entered a period of structural change and decline in activity mainly due to the impact of e-substitution on mail

volumes and post office transactions. This has had a significant impact on the post office network and I understand that overall activity levels are down approximately 15% since 2013. In addition annual payments have reduced by up to 20% in some offices. There is no doubt that 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.

As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I am responsible for the postal sector including the governance of An Post. Operational matters relating to the company's retail business, including the post office network, are matters for the Board and management of An Post. I appreciate that there is concern regarding the potential closure of post offices and the potential number involved. This has been exacerbated by the media coverage on this issue over the past week. I would again reiterate that no definitive decision has been made by An Post regarding post office closures. 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. Government remains fully committed to a sustainable post office network which it sees as a key piece of economic and social infrastructure for both rural and urban.

The fundamental review of the company is being undertaken to identify the strategic changes and restructuring necessary to put the company on a sound financial footing. An Post has recognised the realities of the current postal environment and is transforming how it does business to be a better fit for the future of e-commerce where the average spend per consumer in Ireland is forecast to nearly double in the next five years. It is imperative that the network be restructured into a viable sustainable, modern and vibrant network for the future, capable of adapting to the changing environment in which it operates. Inevitably, the scale of the envisaged change will impact on individual postmasters and some postmasters, who have given long and dedicated service to their local communities and to An Post, may find it a challenge to adopt to a very significant renewal programme. Any changes in this area will have to be the subject of negotiation between An Post and the postmasters. I continue to encourage An Post to continue to work closely with all parties to find an agreed solution to the renewal of the network.

I have met the Irish Postmasters' Union and was interested to hear their perspective on how to renew what continues to be a very valuable resource for both urban and rural communities.

Until such time as the review is finalised and assessed it is not be possible to comment further. Government will be briefed once a definitive strategy has been agreed.

Lobbying Data

526. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42286/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015, persons who fall within the scope of the Act who communicate with Designated Public Officials about relevant matters must register and submit returns of lobbying activity. Details of the lobbying activity, if any, referred to by the Deputy can be accessed on the Register of Lobbying maintained under the Act by the Standards in Public Office Commission.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

527. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the roll-out of at least 30 Mb broadband speeds to a location (details supplied) in County Donegal as part of the national broadband plan; if such areas with poor or no broadband coverage will be prioritised during the roll-out phase as part of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42302/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode by individuals who are seeking information.

- The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

The map shows that there are over 101,000 premises in County Donegal, about 68,000 of which fall within a BLUE area of the Map and will be covered by commercial operators. Just under 17,000 of these 68,000 premises form part of eir's planned rural deployment to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and the end of 2018. The remaining 33,000 premises in County Donegal fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

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 process was reached last week with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage 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, in July 2016, a Taskforce to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for rollout 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 NBP State led 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 is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

National Broadband Plan Administration

529. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the anticipated timeframe for the completion of the tender process for broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42338/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

Last Tuesday, 26 September, 2017, ‘Detailed Solutions’ were submitted to my Department by two bidders as part of that ongoing procurement process. 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.

My Department’s specialist NBP team, comprising a broad mix of expertise and experience including specialists in procurement, project management, engineering, commercial and financial analysts as well as legal advisors will now evaluate these two submissions over the coming weeks. The procurement process has now entered its final stages.

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.

Ministerial Meetings

530. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he or officials from his Department have met with or had representations made to them regarding energy policy and renewable energy by representatives of a company (details supplied); and the details of all such meetings or representations. [42385/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): To date neither I or my officials have had meetings or representations from the company named by the Deputy. My officials have occasionally met a representative of the company (who is also a member of the Board of SEAI) on an informal basis as part of routine engagement with energy sector stakeholders. Recently a formal request to meet officials was received, however no arrangements have yet been made. Such interactions are characteristic of on-going engagement by the Department with energy sector stakeholders.

Road Safety

531. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to the State of the request by An Garda Síochána in July 2016 for new roadside breath test devices to have functional capacity to collect specific types of information and data which An Garda Síochána

chána had previously requested (details supplied) in view of the fact that this request, so late on in the procurement process which was at that point 80% complete, set back the whole process by 12 to 15 months. [42890/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Medical Bureau of Road Safety. I have referred the question to the Bureau for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Swimming Pool Programme Status

532. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which recreational amenity requirements continue to be reviewed throughout County Kildare having particular regard to previous unsuccessful applications for funding towards a swimming pool, the case for which remains stronger than ever; the extent to which negotiations continue to take place with a college (details supplied) and/or a company in respect of a swimming pool; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42464/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): As the Deputy is aware, in January 2016 my Department contacted local authorities and sought expressions of interest in a limited round of swimming pool allocations for the construction of new swimming pools and/or the refurbishment of existing pools, subject to funding becoming available from other projects where those projects would not be progressed.

The local authorities were informed that they would be required to show inter-alia that they would have chargeable title to the proposed facility, would be able to progress the project without delay and that they would also need to show that the pool would serve an existing need for such a facility. Kildare County Council submitted an expression of interest for a pool in Maynooth but because the Council did not have chargeable title to the proposed facility, that expression of interest was invalid.

There are four swimming pool projects in the current programme and the priority in 2017 is on progressing these projects.

In relation to the future funding of swimming pools, my Department is currently finalising a review of national sports policy. This includes a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities including swimming pools in the years ahead. I would hope to be in a position to publish the new sports policy later this year.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

533. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a golf club (details supplied) will receive funding from the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42529/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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. 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.

Tourism Data

534. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the causes for the drop in tourist numbers coming here from Britain in the past few months have been identified; his plans to reverse this trend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42540/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I welcome the overall growth in visit numbers to Ireland in the first eight months of 2017. However, the persistent decline in the numbers visiting from Great Britain continues to be a concern. The fall in the value of sterling against the euro following the Brexit vote in the UK has been the primary factor in this.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing Ireland as a tourist destination in overseas markets. I am informed that it has implemented a series of actions in the GB market to address the implications of Brexit and the fall in the value of sterling. For example, a greater focus has been placed on “culturally curious” visitors, who are less impacted by currency fluctuations and highlighting off-season breaks and value offers. I am aware also that Tourism Ireland has increased publicity and trade visits for the border area, where the impact of the drop in British visitors has been most keenly felt. As well as this, it is pursuing a market diversification strategy. This aims to attract more visitors from markets which deliver longer stays and, therefore, higher revenue returns. This strategy is bearing fruit as evidenced by the significant increase in visitors from North America and other markets thus far in 2017.

Fáilte Ireland has recently launched its Brexit Response Programme. Its new ‘Get Brexit Ready’ programme offers a suite of industry supports, designed to help businesses struggling with the loss of trade created by Brexit. The programme allows individual businesses to self-assess their exposures and risks and provides a range of interventions to match their needs.

Sports Injuries Guidelines

535. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request organisations (details supplied) to conduct a study into a possible link between heading the ball and brain injuries, similar to that of their English counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42556/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware of the recent research study to which the Deputy refers. I welcome any such studies or initiatives which will ultimately make sport safer for all those involved.

I fully recognise the importance of ensuring the safety of players. Player welfare is paramount. Various organisations have concussion and head injury guidelines for their sports, which stress the importance of ensuring the health and well-being of the players.

The Deputy should be aware that neither I nor Sport Ireland have a statutory role or remit with regard to monitoring or reviewing the safety standards in use by, or applicable to, National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs). NGBs must, of course, abide by Health and Safety legislation and should have regard to any guidance issued by relevant statutory agencies. The safety of all those involved in sport is of paramount importance, whether as participants, competitors, spectators, volunteers or workers.

Air Services Provision

536. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to the economy of the cancellation of a company's (details supplied) flights to and from Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42557/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The airline (details supplied) has announced a small number of flight cancellations to and from Dublin airport which includes 40 individual flights in the period to end October 2017, and a further 22 flights per week from its winter schedule running from 1 November 2017 to March 24th 2018.

It is understood that the affected routes to and from Dublin are served by multiple connections each day, and that a number of affected customers have been offered alternative flights or re-routing options by the airline, in accordance with their passenger rights under EU Regulation 261/2004.

There are no route suspensions at Dublin Airport. Ireland's air connectivity, in terms of the range of services available to support economic growth, is being maintained (albeit at a reduced level of frequency across a small number of routes).

It is not possible to assess the precise cost to the economy of the cancellation of certain services during the winter season, but in the circumstances outlined above the impact is not significant.

Penalty Points System Data

537. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of penalty points issued in each county in respect of each offence in the past year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42567/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The attached table provides the details requested by the Deputy on the number of penalty points issued in each county in respect of each offence in the past year (1st October 2016 to 30th September 2017).

Penalty Points issued in each County By Offence (1st October 2016 to 30th September 2017)

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
22-35mcg of alcohol per 100ml of breath	9	42	54	183	42	216	99	54	81
50-80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood		3	6	21		27	9	12	6

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
67-107mg of alcohol per 100ml of urine	3		9	21	12	21	6	15	3
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M1 Vehicle	145	135	543	1,139	242	1,288	1,605	220	368
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M2 Vehicle	11	3		15		12	12	3	3
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M3 Vehicle	3					8	3		
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N1 Vehicle	38	57	81	187	164	252	320	48	56
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N2 Vehicle	6	24	33	61	12	66	66	20	29
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N3 Vehicle	27	33	21	49	21	172	30	6	66
Bald/ Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Left front wheel	4	18	12	72	8	48	22	18	20

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Bald/ Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Left rear wheel		4	10	30	4	20	6	6	4
Bald/ Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Right front wheel	4	18	22	60	10	36	22	16	12
Bald/ Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Right rear wheel	2	12	20	52	12	22	10	2	8
Breach of duties on occurrence of an accident	20	25	45	195	15	245	60	35	25
Breach of motorway outside lane driving rule	1					4		1	
Careless Driving	25	40	75	485	105	320	115	50	45
Con- traven- tion of require- ments at junc- tions									

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Con- traven- tion of require- ments for revers- ing						1			
Contra- vention of rules for use of mini round- abouts		1			1	4			
Cross con- tinuous white line/ broken white line	27	80	80	414	133	327	254	154	151
Cross- ing 'No Entry' sign				1		4			
Dan- gerous Driving Re- duced to Careless Driving		80	35	235	180	235	90	70	60
Drive against flow of traffic on motor- way			2	8			4	2	2
Drive on hard shoul- der/non carriage- way - motor- way				6		17			2
Driver (Owner) Exceed- ing Maxi- mum Load			1	1			1	1	

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Driver (Owner) Exceeding Maximum Weight				1					
Driver Exceeding Design Gross Vehicle Weight		1		1			3		1
Driver Exceeding Maximum Weight				5		1	2	1	
Driver Fail ensure Passenger U/17 wear Safety Belt	3	49	69	141	27	194	132	105	29
Driver Fail Restrain Child O/3 in Child Restraint	14	20	73	187	25	161	305	63	47
Driver Fail Restrain Child U/3 in Child Restraint	6	18	33	73	20	121	74	25	29
Driver Owner Exceeding Design Gross Vehicle Weight			1						

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Driver Owner Transmits greater Load than Max Load Permitted									
Driving a vehicle while holding a mobile phone	948	1,166	2,730	8,995	1,361	10,269	6,686	2,537	3,531
Driving along/ across median strip	2	4	8	30	8	38	22	6	8
Driving dangerously defective vehicle		5	15	15		5			
Driving on/ across cycle track						4			
Driving on/ across footway			1	2		8			1
Driving past a red light. Contrary to sec 35(5) RTA 1994	6	3		6		308	3		28
Driving without reasonable consideration	126	106	256	642	246	1,554	598	210	624
Entry to hatched marked area	2	4	1	57	25	90	26	4	23

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Exceed 100 km/h limit	692	1,170	1,748	6,530	3,074	11,695	2,109	1,852	2,086
Exceed 120 km/h limit	479	218	789	3,459	99	5,045	1,822	553	1,089
Exceed 30 km/h limit		9			12	36		3	12
Exceed 50 km/h limit	2,602	1,759	5,135	14,967	3,551	37,313	16,151	4,577	8,027
Exceed 60 km/h limit	856	1,201	2,955	10,014	1,297	20,379	2,451	2,218	3,597
Exceed 80 km/h limit	468	666	2,120	2,732	1,275	9,149	2,884	867	2,554
Exceed ordinary speed limit (certain vehicles)			3	15	12	6	9	6	15
Exceed ordinary speed limit (class of vehicle)	48	108	87	388	168	316	100	97	137
Exceed road works speed limit									
Fail to act in accordance with Garda signal						5			
Fail to comply with Keep to Right/ Left signs									3

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Fail to comply with mandatory traffic signs	2			18		48	2		8
Fail to comply with No Entry traffic sign		1		8	2	32	2	2	3
Fail to comply with prohibitory traffic signs	16	18	16	121	3	588	34	8	35
Fail to comply with traffic lane markings	2	1	28	105	1	79	3	5	1
Fail to Deactivate Airbag Child Restraint in use						3			
Fail to drive on the left hand side				12	2	24			
Fail to obey rules at railway level crossing			2			2			
Fail to obey traffic lights	30	30	173	1,188	54	3,359	457	87	453
Fail to stop before stop sign/stop line	6	14	36	48	21	98	30	15	30
Fail to stop for Garda	4	5	7	35	21	95	26	7	2

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Fail to turn left onto a roundabout							1		
Fail to yield right of way	2	2	4	16	6	52	4	2	2
Fail to yield right of way at sign/line	3		3	20	3	26		3	9
General speed obligation - stop visible distance			3	3		9			8
Learner driver unaccompanied by a qualified driver	122	122	330	1,134	72	1,868	274	172	316
Motorcycle Tyre with Depth Less than 1mm - User			2			2			
No cert of road worthiness user	5	5	5	80	5	90	35	5	15
No insurance - (user)	95	380	640	1,690	660	5,630	1,005	465	845
No safety belt - driver								4	
Non-Display of L Plate (Learner Driver)	82	82	66	376	34	800	192	52	190

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Non-Display of N plate (Novice driver)	8	22	30	42	28	58	42	8	10
Non-Display of yellow 'L' tabard on motorcycle		2	2	34		30			12
Non-Display of yellow 'N' tabard on motorcycle				6		2			
Offence relating to Overtaking	11	27	9	264	63	193	142	35	33
Parking a vehicle in a dangerous position			3	21		27	6		
Proceeding beyond a traffic lane control sign						2			
Proceeding beyond max design gross vehicle weight sign									1
Proceeding beyond max vehicle axle loading weight sign			1						

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Re-duced to Driving without reason-able consid-eration	8			48		44	24	92	
Speed limit de-vice not in use									
Speed-ing Buses no standing passen-gers								3	
Speed-ing Combi-nation of vehicles	6	6		30	15	12		3	6
Speed-ing Ordinary Vehicles > 35 00									
Striking bridge with vehicle							3		
Tyre with Cut - User					2		4		
Tyre with Depth Less than 1.6 mm - User	2	6	30	24	4	6	4	4	2
Tyre with Lump/ Bulge/ Tear/ Partial Failure - User				2	2		2	2	
Tyre with Ply/Cord Exposed - User		4	8	12	8	8	2		

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Offences Type	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare
Unsuitable Tyre - User				6		2	4		
Unsuitable Tyre due to degree of inflation - User									2
Use vehicle without NCT certificate	261	422	362	2,498	290	5,329	877	297	1,103
Using vehicle without authorisation plate goods vehicle/trailer									
U-Turn on dual carriage-way/ central reserve/ traffic			2	4		6			
TOTAL	7,242	8,231	18,835	59,340	13,457	118,566	39,286	15,128	25,868

table cont.

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
22-35mg of alcohol per 100ml of breath	27	54	9	57	27	18	51	48	30	33
50-80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood		6		9		3	6		3	
67-107mg of alcohol per 100ml of urine	3	6		6			3	6	3	

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M1 Vehicle	226	550	69	923	99	151	285	267	202	477
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M2 Vehicle	6			3	3	3	6	3		21
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M3 Vehicle				3					3	3
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N1 Vehicle	26	162	15	167	61	38	62	35	15	97
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N2 Vehicle	9	30	6	33	6	18	15	18	6	29
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N3 Vehicle	15	17	6	36	15	18	15	35	59	41
Bald/Not main-tained/ cause damage tyre-Left front wheel	2	24	6	8	2	4	4	4	4	10
Bald/Not main-tained/ cause damage tyre-Left rear wheel	6	6		4			8	8		4
Bald/Not main-tained/ cause damage tyre-Right front wheel	12	10		24	2	4	14	12	4	

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Bald/Not maintained/ cause damage tyre- Right rear wheel	2	8		2			6			12
Breach of duties on occurrence of an accident	20	10	5	60	15	5	15	30		15
Breach of motorway outside lane driving rule	1		1					2	2	
Careless Driving	35	35	5	95	25	35	5	60	50	30
Con- traven- tion of require- ments at junctions										
Con- traven- tion of require- ments for reversing										
Contra- vention of rules for use of mini round- abouts		3		1						
Cross continu- ous white line/bro- ken white line	45	78	18	127	38	54	137	132	96	62
Cross- ing 'No Entry' sign								1		
Dan- gerous Driving Re- duced to Careless Driving	20	25	20	110	15	115	15	55	60	15
Drive against flow of traffic on motorway		2								
Drive on hard shoulder/ non car- riageway - motor- way	2	4		2				5		1

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Driver (Owner) Exceeding Maximum Load	4							3		
Driver (Owner) Exceeding Maximum Weight	1	1								
Driver Exceeding Design Gross Vehicle Weight							1			1
Driver Exceeding Maximum Weight	1	2			1		5			
Driver Fail ensure Passenger U/17 wear Safety Belt	18	75	9	119	14	24	59	21	15	54
Driver Fail Restrain Child O/3 in Child Restraint	9	72	6	144	21	14	30	59	22	30
Driver Fail Restrain Child U/3 in Child Restraint	6	26		60	12	11	30	23	17	17
Driver Owner Exceeding Design Gross Vehicle Weight										
Driver Owner Transmits greater Load than Max Load Permitted				2						
Driving a vehicle while holding a mobile phone	1,550	2,294	401	4,923	594	1,211	2,053	2,442	1,247	1,182

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Driving along/ across median strip	16	4	4	2	8	2	8	8	2	6
Driving dangerously defective vehicle	5			5			5			
Driving on/across cycle track										
Driving on/across footway				1						
Driving past a red light. Contrary to sec 35(5)RTA 1994					3	3	9	6		3
Driving without reasonable consideration	144	214	34	334	96	146	202	228	88	152
Entry to hatched marked area	3		1	6	5	10	5	27	28	5
Exceed 100 km/h limit	1,103	886	574	2,209	615	1,092	2,211	2,340	1,488	709
Exceed 120 km/h limit	744	468	82	1,031	156	470	399	883	113	336
Exceed 30 km/h limit	9	57				71		110	35	6
Exceed 50 km/h limit	3,324	2,712	1,313	5,815	1,561	2,937	5,761	5,585	1,747	3,077
Exceed 60 km/h limit	1,609	1,085	275	3,307	436	1,858	2,664	3,003	1,390	686
Exceed 80 km/h limit	830	720	208	1,874	558	879	1,548	2,537	420	1,406
Exceed ordinary speed limit (certain vehicles)	3	3		6		6		9	3	
Exceed ordinary speed limit (class of vehicle)	134	89	20	126	20	117	109	97	112	81

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Exceed road works speed limit										
Fail to act in accordance with Garda signal		1								
Fail to comply with Keep to Right/ Left signs								1		
Fail to comply with mandatory traffic signs				8				6		
Fail to comply with No Entry traffic sign	1	2	1	8		3		4	1	1
Fail to comply with prohibitory traffic signs	3	7	2	42	2	17	6	30	7	3
Fail to comply with traffic lane markings	1			57	1	4	3	9	4	
Fail to Deactivate Airbag Child Restraint in use										
Fail to drive on the left hand side							2	2	2	
Fail to obey rules at railway level crossing										
Fail to obey traffic lights	75	35	12	309	65	165	89	256	54	68
Fail to stop before stop sign/stop line	9	14	3	39	8	14	6	32	15	14
Fail to stop for Garda	10	4	2	21		12	12	4	7	

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Fail to turn left onto a roundabout										
Fail to yield right of way		2	4	6	4	6	2	4	2	2
Fail to yield right of way at sign/line				3			3	9	3	
General speed obligation - stop visible distance	6							3		
Learner driver unaccompanied by a qualified driver	204	174	10	236	54	102	136	194	46	160
Motorcycle Tyre with Depth Less than 1mm - User										
No cert of road worthiness user	5	10	5	35	10	20	15	10	5	10
No insurance - (user)	160	405	70	895	330	375	185	960	260	425
No safety belt - driver										
Non-Display of L Plate (Learner Driver)	64	94	2	128	68	40	62	86	20	90
Non-Display of N plate (Novice driver)	16	6		28	6	4	30	14	34	32
Non-Display of yellow 'L' tabard on motorcycle	6			8		6		2		8
Non-Display of yellow 'N' tabard on motorcycle										

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Offence relating to Over-taking	32	15	9	64	12	6	48	48	29	25
Parking a vehicle in a dangerous position				9	3		6	18	3	
Proceeding beyond a traffic lane control sign										
Proceeding beyond max design gross vehicle weight sign								1		
Proceeding beyond max vehicle axle loading weight sign										
Reduced to Driving without reasonable consideration	44	8		88	8	12		20	4	8
Speed limit device not in use						3				
Speeding Buses no standing passengers										
Speeding Combination of vehicles	3	3	6	6			6	9		3
Speeding Ordinary Vehicles > 35 00		3								
Striking bridge with vehicle										
Tyre with Cut - User	2			4						
Tyre with Depth Less than 1.6 mm - User	2	18		14	4		10	4		4

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Tyre with Lump/ Bulge/ Tear/ Partial Failure - User				2	2					
Tyre with Ply/Cord Exposed - User		4		6	4	2	10	2		4
Unsuitable Tyre - User							2			
Unsuitable Tyre due to degree of inflation - User										
Use vehicle without NCT certificate	378	638	41	738	196	468	208	1,103	212	543
Using vehicle without authorisation plate goods vehicle/trailer					3		3			
U-Turn on dual carriage-way/central reserve/traffic	2									
TOTAL	10,993	11,181	3,254	24,388	5,188	10,576	16,590	20,933	7,972	10,001

Table cont

table cont.

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
22-35mg of alcohol per 100ml of breath	27	54	9	57	27	18	51	48	30	33
50-80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood		6		9		3	6		3	
67-107mg of alcohol per 100ml of urine	3	6		6			3	6	3	

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M1 Vehicle	226	550	69	923	99	151	285	267	202	477
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M2 Vehicle	6			3	3	3	6	3		21
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M3 Vehicle				3					3	3
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N1 Vehicle	26	162	15	167	61	38	62	35	15	97
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N2 Vehicle	9	30	6	33	6	18	15	18	6	29
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N3 Vehicle	15	17	6	36	15	18	15	35	59	41
Bald/Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Left front wheel	2	24	6	8	2	4	4	4	4	10
Bald/Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Left rear wheel	6	6		4			8	8		4
Bald/Not maintained/ cause damage tyre-Right front wheel	12	10		24	2	4	14	12	4	

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Bald/Not maintained/ cause damage tyre- Right rear wheel	2	8		2			6			12
Breach of duties on occurrence of an accident	20	10	5	60	15	5	15	30		15
Breach of motorway outside lane driving rule	1		1					2	2	
Careless Driving	35	35	5	95	25	35	5	60	50	30
Con- traven- tion of require- ments at junctions										
Con- traven- tion of require- ments for reversing										
Contra- vention of rules for use of mini round- abouts		3		1						
Cross continu- ous white line/bro- ken white line	45	78	18	127	38	54	137	132	96	62
Cross- ing 'No Entry' sign								1		
Dan- gerous Driving Re- duced to Careless Driving	20	25	20	110	15	115	15	55	60	15
Drive against flow of traffic on motorway		2								
Drive on hard shoulder/ non car- riageway - motor- way	2	4		2				5		1

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Driver (Owner) Exceeding Maximum Load	4							3		
Driver (Owner) Exceeding Maximum Weight	1	1								
Driver Exceeding Design Gross Vehicle Weight							1			1
Driver Exceeding Maximum Weight	1	2			1		5			
Driver Fail ensure Passenger U/17 wear Safety Belt	18	75	9	119	14	24	59	21	15	54
Driver Fail Restrain Child O/3 in Child Restraint	9	72	6	144	21	14	30	59	22	30
Driver Fail Restrain Child U/3 in Child Restraint	6	26		60	12	11	30	23	17	17
Driver Owner Exceeding Design Gross Vehicle Weight										
Driver Owner Transmits greater Load than Max Load Permitted				2						
Driving a vehicle while holding a mobile phone	1,550	2,294	401	4,923	594	1,211	2,053	2,442	1,247	1,182

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Driving along/ across median strip	16	4	4	2	8	2	8	8	2	6
Driving dangerously defective vehicle	5			5			5			
Driving on/across cycle track										
Driving on/across footway				1						
Driving past a red light. Contrary to sec 35(5)RTA 1994					3	3	9	6		3
Driving without reasonable consideration	144	214	34	334	96	146	202	228	88	152
Entry to hatched marked area	3		1	6	5	10	5	27	28	5
Exceed 100 km/h limit	1,103	886	574	2,209	615	1,092	2,211	2,340	1,488	709
Exceed 120 km/h limit	744	468	82	1,031	156	470	399	883	113	336
Exceed 30 km/h limit	9	57				71		110	35	6
Exceed 50 km/h limit	3,324	2,712	1,313	5,815	1,561	2,937	5,761	5,585	1,747	3,077
Exceed 60 km/h limit	1,609	1,085	275	3,307	436	1,858	2,664	3,003	1,390	686
Exceed 80 km/h limit	830	720	208	1,874	558	879	1,548	2,537	420	1,406
Exceed ordinary speed limit (certain vehicles)	3	3		6		6		9	3	
Exceed ordinary speed limit (class of vehicle)	134	89	20	126	20	117	109	97	112	81

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Exceed road works speed limit										
Fail to act in accordance with Garda signal		1								
Fail to comply with Keep to Right/ Left signs								1		
Fail to comply with mandatory traffic signs				8				6		
Fail to comply with No Entry traffic sign	1	2	1	8		3		4	1	1
Fail to comply with prohibitory traffic signs	3	7	2	42	2	17	6	30	7	3
Fail to comply with traffic lane markings	1			57	1	4	3	9	4	
Fail to Deactivate Airbag Child Restraint in use										
Fail to drive on the left hand side							2	2	2	
Fail to obey rules at railway level crossing										
Fail to obey traffic lights	75	35	12	309	65	165	89	256	54	68
Fail to stop before stop sign/stop line	9	14	3	39	8	14	6	32	15	14
Fail to stop for Garda	10	4	2	21		12	12	4	7	

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Fail to turn left onto a roundabout										
Fail to yield right of way		2	4	6	4	6	2	4	2	2
Fail to yield right of way at sign/line				3			3	9	3	
General speed obligation - stop visible distance	6							3		
Learner driver unaccompanied by a qualified driver	204	174	10	236	54	102	136	194	46	160
Motorcycle Tyre with Depth Less than 1mm - User										
No cert of road worthiness user	5	10	5	35	10	20	15	10	5	10
No insurance - (user)	160	405	70	895	330	375	185	960	260	425
No safety belt - driver										
Non-Display of L Plate (Learner Driver)	64	94	2	128	68	40	62	86	20	90
Non-Display of N plate (Novice driver)	16	6		28	6	4	30	14	34	32
Non-Display of yellow 'L' tabard on motorcycle	6			8		6		2		8
Non-Display of yellow 'N' tabard on motorcycle										

Questions - Written Answers

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Offence relating to Over-taking	32	15	9	64	12	6	48	48	29	25
Parking a vehicle in a dangerous position				9	3		6	18	3	
Proceeding beyond a traffic lane control sign										
Proceeding beyond max design gross vehicle weight sign								1		
Proceeding beyond max vehicle axle loading weight sign										
Reduced to Driving without reasonable consideration	44	8		88	8	12		20	4	8
Speed limit device not in use						3				
Speeding Buses no standing passengers										
Speeding Combination of vehicles	3	3	6	6			6	9		3
Speeding Ordinary Vehicles > 35 00		3								
Striking bridge with vehicle										
Tyre with Cut - User	2			4						
Tyre with Depth Less than 1.6 mm - User	2	18		14	4		10	4		4

Offences Type	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly
Tyre with Lump/Bulge/Tear/Partial Failure - User				2	2					
Tyre with Ply/Cord Exposed - User		4		6	4	2	10	2		4
Unsuitable Tyre - User							2			
Unsuitable Tyre due to degree of inflation - User										
Use vehicle without NCT certificate	378	638	41	738	196	468	208	1,103	212	543
Using vehicle without authorisation plate goods vehicle/trailer					3		3			
U-Turn on dual carriage-way/central reserve/traffic	2									
TOTAL	10,993	11,181	3,254	24,388	5,188	10,576	16,590	20,933	7,972	10,001

Penalty Points System Data

538. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the speeding offences for which penalty points were issued in the past year, for example, those who were issued points for speeding up to 5 kph above the speed limit, 6 to 10 kph above the limit, 11 to 15 kph above the limit and 16 kph and over above the speed limit, respectively, by the speed limit in operation in the locations in which the offences occurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42568/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The speeding details requested by the Deputy are not provided to my Department by An Garda Síochána. The speeding offences details for penalty points provided to my Department and recorded on the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF) are as follows.

Number of Penalty Point Speeding Offences recorded on the NVDF.	
Penalty Point Speed Offences	Number of Offences
Exceed 100 km/h limit	21,617

Questions - Written Answers

Number of Penalty Point Speeding Offences recorded on the NVDF.	
Penalty Point Speed Offences	Number of Offences
Exceed 120 km/h limit	8,802
Exceed 30 km/h limit	142
Exceed 50 km/h limit	55,246
Exceed 60 km/h limit	28,055
Exceed 80 km/h limit	16,087
Exceed ordinary speed limit (certain vehicles)	54
Exceed ordinary speed limit (class of vehicle)	1,196
Exceed road works speed limit	1
General speed obligation - stop visible distance	15
Speeding Buses no standing passengers	1
Speeding Combination of vehicles	64
Speeding Ordinary Vehicles >3500	3
TOTAL	131,283

Penalty Points System Data

539. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of drivers with live penalty points in the past year, by the number of penalty points accumulated and county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42569/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The following table provides the details requested by the Deputy of the number of drivers with live penalty points in the past year (1st October 2016 to 30th September 2017) broken down by number of penalty points and county.

Breakdown of Drivers by Number of Penalty Points and County recorded on the NVDF between 1st October 2016 to 30th September 2017:

County	Number of Drivers												TOTAL
	1 P.P.	2 P.P.	3 P.P.	4 P.P.	5 P.P.	6 P.P.	7 P.P.	8 P.P.	9 P.P.	10 P.P.	11 P.P.	12 P.P.	
CARLOW	17	103	1,807	29	140	90	3	13	6	5		1	2,214
CAVAN	19	121	1,923	29	244	100	4	19	6	2	1		2,468
CLARE	36	259	4,528	52	427	308	3	22	16	13	2	1	5,667
CORK	235	819	14,185	186	1,629	748	18	60	46	33	7	8	17,974
DONEGAL	28	167	3,336	21	361	160	3	16	6		1	2	4,101
DUBLIN	601	1,487	26,741	356	4,202	1,465	32	154	93	85	8	22	35,246
GALWAY	48	386	9,629	83	836	672	7	37	43	21	5	3	11,770
KERRY	14	177	3,824	43	352	180	3	15	8	1	1	3	4,621
KILDARE	49	442	6,280	49	646	350	5	20	11	13	1	9	7,875
KILKENNY	13	162	2,776	38	228	148	4	7	6	1			3,383
LAOIS	18	183	2,725	34	217	177	3	11	16	2	2	3	3,391

County	Number of Drivers												TOTAL
	1 P.P.	2 P.P.	3 P.P.	4 P.P.	5 P.P.	6 P.P.	7 P.P.	8 P.P.	9 P.P.	10 P.P.	11 P.P.	12 P.P.	
LEITRIM	4	23	872	3	46	51		5					1,004
LIMERICK	86	265	5,596	72	811	326	6	27	17	18	2	5	7,231
LONG-FORD	9	66	1,183	17	157	76	3	9	7	2		1	1,530
LOUTH	29	123	2,574	12	336	100	1	12	5	4	3	2	3,201
MAYO	16	170	4,477	21	185	250	1	9	14	4	2	2	5,151
MEATH	60	208	5,147	32	575	257	2	26	8	12	4	1	6,332
MONAGHAN	31	70	1,975	16	173	128	1	9	5	2	2	1	2,413
OFFALY	11	146	2,411	35	233	140	2	16	12	7			3,013
ROSCOMMON	9	107	2,458	7	172	186	1	13	7	1		1	2,962
SLIGO	14	69	1,861	9	122	109		7	5	3		1	2,200
TIPPERARY	27	191	4,895	55	519	241	5	13	13	8	1	2	5,970
WATERFORD	12	255	2,770	40	253	132	3	8	3	6		2	3,484
WESTMEATH	10	172	2,327	18	283	114	2	18	8	9		1	2,962
WEXFORD	123	396	5,917	88	470	376	11	37	14	10		6	7,448
WICKLOW	31	188	4,169	30	335	201	1	19	12	3	4	4	4,997
FOREIGN LICENCE HOLDERS	192	595	18,660	42	538	690	4	38	51	4	2	8	20,824
UNKNOWN			2	13	204								219
Total	1,742	7,350	145,048	1,430	14,694	7,775	128	640	438	269	48	89	179,651

Penalty Points System Data

540. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of drivers disqualified from driving, by category of driver (details supplied), having reached the number of penalty points required for automatic disqualification; the offences which resulted in them attracting those points; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42570/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The following tabular statements provide the details requested by the Deputy.

Table 1: This table provides the number of drivers currently disqualified broken down by driving licence type

Driver Details	Number of Drivers
Full	459
Learner Permit	136
Novice Driver	157
No Driver Number	56

Questions - Written Answers

Driver Details	Number of Drivers
Total	808

Table 2: This table provides the driving licence type broken down by penalty point offence.

Penalty Point Of-fence	Full	Learner Permit	Novice Driver	No Driver Number
22-35mcg of alcohol per 100ml of breath	9			
50-80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood	1			
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M1 Vehicle	72	20	12	7
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. M2 Vehicle	1			
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N1 Vehicle	16			
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N2 Vehicle	1			1
Adult Failing to wear Safety Belt cat. N3 Vehicle	3			1
Bald/Not maintained/cause damage tyre-Left front wheel	2	1	3	
Bald/Not maintained/cause damage tyre-Left rear wheel	1		5	
Bald/Not maintained/cause damage tyre-Right front wheel	4	1	3	
Bald/Not maintained/cause damage tyre-Right rear wheel	1		1	
Breach of duties on occurrence of an accident	4	1		
Careless Driving contrary to section 52(1)	5		1	
Cross continuous white line/broken white line	10	7	1	4
Dangerous Driving Reduced to Careless driving	7		3	

Penalty Point Of-fence	Full	Learner Permit	Novice Driver	No Driver Number
Drive on hard shoulder/non carriageway - motorway		3		
Driver Fail ensure Passenger U/17 wear Safety Belt	10	3	1	2
Driver Fail Restrain Child O/3 in Child Restraint	16	8	3	
Driver Fail Restrain Child U/3 in Child Restraint	9	4	2	2
Driving a vehicle while holding a mobile phone	221	7	21	18
Driving dangerously defective vehicle	2			
Driving past a red light. Contrary to sec 35(5)RTA 1994	3			1
Driving without reasonable consideration	25	11	14	3
Entry to hatched marked area	5	1		
Exceed 100 km/h limit	141	30	30	17
Exceed 120 km/h limit	68	12	10	14
Exceed 30 km/h limit		1		
Exceed 50 km/h limit	251	50	42	26
Exceed 50 mph (Dublin)		1		
Exceed 60 km/h limit	170	36	20	18
Exceed 80 km/h limit	90	27	14	14
Exceed ordinary speed limit (class of vehicle)	8			2
Fail to act in accordance with Garda signal	1			
Fail to comply with Keep to Right/Left signs			1	
Fail to comply with mandatory traffic signs	1	1	1	

Questions - Written Answers

Penalty Point Of-fence	Full	Learner Permit	Novice Driver	No Driver Number
Fail to comply with No Entry traffic sign	1			
Fail to comply with prohibitory traffic signs	6	5	1	1
Fail to comply with traffic lane markings	2	1		
Fail to obey traffic lights	33	16	7	3
Fail to stop before stop sign/stop line	3	1	1	
Fail to stop for Garda	4		1	
Fail to yield right of way	1			
Fail to yield right of way at sign/line		1		
Learner driver unaccompanied by a qualified driver	10	45	86	3
Motorcycle Tyre with Depth Less than 1mm - User	1			
No cert of road worthiness user		3		
No child restraint rear seat - child		3		
No insurance - (user)	45	33	33	2
No safety belt - driver	3	20	1	
No safety belt front seat - child		1		
No safety belt rear seat - child		1		
Non-Display of L Plate (Learner Driver)	6	39	63	1
Non-Display of N plate (Novice driver)	2		9	
Non-Display of yellow 'L' tabard on motorcycle	2			
Offence relating to Overtaking	10	1	4	1
Speeding	2	1		
Tyre with Depth Less than 1.6 mm - User		1	2	

Penalty Point Offence	Full	Learner Permit	Novice Driver	No Driver Number
Tyre with Ply/Cord Exposed - User	1			
Use vehicle without NCT certificate	73	37	18	9

Greenways Development

541. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has received correspondence from Donegal County Council regarding proposals to develop a dedicated greenway route on the former rail line linking Letterkenny to Burtonport; the progress that has been made to develop this proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42579/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Donegal County Council (DCC) submitted a proposal to my Department for the construction of a greenway from Letterkenny to Burtonport under the National Cycle Network 2014-2016 funding programme. However, the Council was not successful in securing funding at that time. I understand that since then DCC have progressed a section of the route with the support of local groups and DCC would be best placed to update the Deputy on the current status of the route.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Donegal is benefitting from a number of cross-border greenways that are being funded by my Department, the Department for Infrastructure (Northern Ireland) and the EU. Lifford, Muff and Bunrana will all benefit from these INTERREG VA projects.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department recently undertook a public consultation process to inform the development of a new Greenways Strategy. My officials are currently reviewing the many submissions received from both citizens and stakeholders including one received from Donegal 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.

Driver Test Regulations

542. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the appeal mechanisms available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who has failed their driving test on a number of occasions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42580/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The current appeals process, involving a hearing in the District Court, is set out in Section 33(5) of the Road Traffic Act 1961.

The legislation refers to an appeal following a decision under Section 33(4) of the Act, which in turn is a decision on granting or refusing a certificate of competence after a test.

For further clarity, Section 33(5) refers to challenges as to whether the test was ‘properly conducted’.

Taxi Licences Renewals

543. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the situation will be remedied with regard to the renewal of taxi licences in circumstances in which when a taxi licence is renewed it is done only by reference to the applicant's driver's licence and therefore does not capture criminal convictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42613/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the renewal of taxi licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Public Transport Data

544. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the absentee rate in Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus across all divisions, for example, drivers, management, administration and mechanics for each month of the past two years, in tabular form. [42616/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issues raised are matters for Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Companies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Greenways Development

545. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when his Department will complete the strategy for the future development of greenways; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42646/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware my Department undertook a public consultation process during the Summer to inform the development of a new Greenway Strategy. Many submissions were received from both citizens and stakeholders expressing strong support for the development of the Strategy. My officials are currently reviewing the submissions and are meeting with other Government Departments and Agencies with a role in this area.

My Department is aiming to have work on the Strategy completed by the end of the year. It will be published in due course, following its completion.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

546. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42654/17]

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 a relevant application has been submitted. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. 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

547. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42655/17]

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 a relevant application has been submitted. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. 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

548. **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. [42656/17]

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 a relevant application has been submitted. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. 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

549. **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. [42657/17]

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 a relevant application has been submitted. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. Ac-

cordingly, 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.

Bus Services

550. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the destination points of the 109 Bus Éireann route; if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42667/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

Haulage Industry Regulation

551. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the proposed introduction of a maximum regulatory weight laden limit for non-articulated rigid trucks with five or more axles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42670/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Due to the need to comply with European legislative requirements, the introduction of a national weight limit for 5 (or more) axle rigid trucks is being deferred. The revised implementation date has now been set as January 1, 2018.

Sports Capital Programme

552. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when grant aid under the sports capital grant programme 2017 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42671/17]

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 level of demand means that 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.

Taxi Licences

553. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a decision will be made in respect of a taxi licence application by a person (details supplied); and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [42674/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the issuing of taxi licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

554. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the feasibility study commissioned under the capital review plan for the N72 Mallow relief road will be published; and if his Department has engaged with Cork county council to this effect. [42700/17]

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 operation of individual road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy’s question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don’t receive a reply within 10 working days.

Fáilte Ireland

555. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the nature of Fáilte Ireland’s occupancy, if as a tenant or in ownership, at a location (details supplied); the proposed relocation plans post-sale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42706/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy’s question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Driver Test Data

556. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the percentage of driving test fails annually in each of the years from 2010 to 2016, nationally and in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42750/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I

would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Ministerial Functions

557. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the position prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42788/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to Dáil Question 174 of the 27th September 2017.

Rail Services

558. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the results of the public consultation on the rail review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42838/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Last year the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann published the Rail Review Report 2016 on which the NTA held a public consultation. Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA submitted a report of those submissions to my Department last week.

I will be considering the report now and I will then bring it to Government. It is my intention that the report on the consultation should be published by the NTA following consideration by Government.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

559. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to reduce greenhouse gases in view of the fact that 19.8% of 2015 greenhouse gas emissions were caused by public transport. [42867/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Greenhouse gas emissions for the entire transport sector in 2015 amounted to 19.8% of total Irish emissions in 2015. The SEAI estimates that less than 5% of transport emissions came from the public transport fleet in 2015 (buses, rail and taxis). It is reliance on private car travel that represents the most considerable challenge, producing over 50% of overall transport emissions.

Moving to a low carbon society represents a significant challenge for Ireland's expanding transport sector where the use of fossil fuels and individual travel patterns are firmly established. Decarbonising transport will require a significant step-change in how we travel, how we do business and the types of fuels and technologies we employ.

To date, a number of successful measures have already been introduced to reduce transport sector emissions including: sustained investment in the public and sustainable transport network to increase capacity and promote modal shift; implementation of EU regulations limiting tail pipe emissions; redesigning the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) and motor tax regimes to promote low carbon emitting vehicles; incentives to encourage alternative fuel and technologies;

and the introduction of a Biofuel Obligation Scheme. Furthermore, under the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government a dedicated Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce was established to consider the range of measures and options available to Government to accelerate the uptake of alternatively powered vehicles.

The transport sector must and will continue to play a strong role in contributing to our national emissions reduction effort. Ireland's welcome return to economic growth has brought with it an increase in transport demand and, without intervention, transport emissions will unquestionably continue to rise. The transport sector is faced with the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions without hindering social improvement or financial recovery.

To decarbonise transport a diverse range of measures is required, key among them being increasing public transport capacity, promoting sustainable travel and modal shift, and encouraging the uptake and deployment of cleaner alternative fuels and technologies. This is reflected in the wide-ranging set of transport mitigation measures included in the National Mitigation Plan and it is anticipated that these measures will develop further as climate research and technological innovations progress.

In suitable urban areas I am strongly committed to meeting increasing travel demand through enhanced public transport capacity and encouraging more cycling and walking journeys - known as "active travel" - and, within the context of the Government's budgetary policy and competing expenditure needs, I am working to be able to invest more in such infrastructure and services over time.

Outside urban areas - where dependence on private cars is strongest and where systems of public transport and active travel offer less realistic potential to addressing travel needs effectively and efficiently - a different solution must be sought, and here alternative fuels and technologies currently offer the most feasible and cost-effective answer.

Electric Vehicles

560. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if companies will be permitted to reclaim VAT on petrol and or diesel to facilitate the purchase of hybrid and plug in hybrid cars. [42868/17]

562. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce free car parking, free toll and the use of certain bus lanes for electric car users. [42870/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 560 and 562 together.

Tax policy and the availability of tax incentives are a matter for the Minister for Finance in the first instance.

The Government is very supportive of the transition of the car fleet to zero emissions technology, especially electric vehicles (EVs). The Deputy may be aware that my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have jointly convened an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Task Force to consider a full suite of potential measures to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies under a commitment outlined in the "Programme for a Partnership Government".

The wide ranging work of the Taskforce has been divided between three working groups ad-

dressings: Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility; Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing; and Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership.

Working Group 1 of the LEV Taskforce, which is chaired by my Department, includes the examination of existing and potential fiscal support measures; developing business related incentives such as the accelerated capital allowance scheme and BIK scheme; as well as the consideration of other incentives including free parking and free tolls for EV drivers.

Interim findings and recommendations of the LEV Taskforce relating to Electric Vehicles have been considered in the context of the 2018 budgetary and estimates processes.

In relation to the potential use of bus lanes by EVs, many cases have been made over the years for extending access to the bus lanes to various classes of traffic. These have been rejected as allowing additional categories of traffic to use the lanes would undermine their efficiency for their given purpose, which is to facilitate bus transport and provide a better quality public transport service, which in turn plays an important role in our overall emissions reduction.

Vehicle Registration

561. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to extend the VRT grant for full hybrid vehicles beyond 31 December 2018. [42869/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, tax policy generally and tax incentives, such as VRT relief, are matters for the Minister for Finance.

The Government is very supportive of the transition of the car fleet to zero emissions technology, especially electric vehicles (EVs). My Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have jointly convened an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Task Force to consider a full suite of potential measures to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies under a commitment outlined in the “Programme for a Partnership Government”.

The three working groups of the Taskforce are addressing Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility; Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing; and Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership.

My Department chairs Working Group 1 of the Taskforce which, among other things, is examining the following: existing and potential fiscal support measures - including the VRT relief; developing business related incentives such as the accelerated capital allowance scheme and BIK scheme; and potential other incentives including free parking and free tolls for EV drivers. Interim findings and recommendations of the LEV Taskforce relating to Electric Vehicles have been considered in the context of the 2018 budgetary and estimates processes.

Question No. 562 answered with Question No. 560.

Electric Vehicles

563. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the percentage of all State vehicles that are hybrid or electric; and the way in which this figure compares with 2015 and 2016 and projected targets up to 2020. [42871/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is not collected in the format sought; however, the following relevant information has been extracted from the National Vehicle File. As of the 31st of September there were 6,536 vehicles registered under the ‘State Owned, Emergency Vehicles and Rescue Vehicles’ tax classification. The Deputy should note that this definition potentially omits some state / public vehicles that are not registered under this tax exemption category. Based on this definition, the following table summaries the number of hybrid and fully electric “State Vehicles” registered from 2015.

As the Deputy is aware, to date the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) in Ireland has been relatively low. There are a range of factors accepted internationally as being barriers to transition to EV technology including limited vehicle choice, range anxiety and low consumer awareness. This slower than anticipated transition to EVs is not Ireland-specific and does not indicate a lack of ambition or support. Increasing range performances, technology advancements, greater affordability and improved consumer choice will be the greatest levers in triggering large-scale change.

The Government is, of course, very supportive of the transition to EVs. My Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have jointly convened an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Task Force to consider a full suite of potential measures to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies under a commitment outlined in the “Programme for a Partnership Government”.

It may interest the Deputy to note that as part of Working Group 1 of the LEV Taskforce – chaired by my Department - the role of public sector leadership in encouraging EV uptake is being examined. In this regard, I understand that the National Procurement Service are planning to introduce a new public procurement framework contract for EVs in 2018 which would allow public bodies to purchase EVs with reduced administrative burden.

Working Group 1 is also examining existing and potential fiscal support measures as well as the development of new incentives. Interim findings and recommendations of the LEV Taskforce relating to Electric Vehicles have been considered in the context of the 2018 budgetary and estimates processes.

-	30th Sept 2017	31st Dec 2016	31st Dec 2015
Total State Owned	6,536	6,474	6,162
Petrol Electric	4	4	7
Electric	5	5	5

National Car Test Fees

564. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the NCT fee of €28 is reasonable for a visual inspection in respect of a headlight which is carried out on the same day as the actual NCT; the reason for this fee; if he will review this fee structure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42889/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Car Test is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in individual cases. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Tourism Promotion

565. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his strategy and plans for counteracting the decline of UK visitor numbers here; the changes he plans to make to his departmental budget to deal with this evolving situation; his strategy for the Border counties in view of the fact that these areas are heavily dependent on UK markets for tourism revenue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43007/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I welcome the overall growth in visit numbers to Ireland in the first eight months of 2017. However, the persistent decline in the numbers visiting from Great Britain continues to be a concern. The fall in the value of sterling against the euro following the Brexit vote in the UK has been the primary factor in this.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing Ireland as a tourist destination in overseas markets. I am informed that it has implemented a series of actions in the GB market to address the implications of Brexit and the fall in the value of sterling. For example, a greater focus has been placed on “culturally curious” visitors, who are less impacted by currency fluctuations and highlighting off-season breaks and value offers. I am aware also that Tourism Ireland has increased publicity and trade visits for the border area. As well as this, it is pursuing a market diversification strategy. This aims to attract more visitors from markets which deliver longer stays and, therefore, higher revenue returns. This strategy is bearing fruit as evidenced by the significant increase in visitors from North America and other markets thus far in 2017.

Fáilte Ireland has recently launched its Brexit Response Programme. It’s new ‘Get Brexit Ready’ programme offers a suite of industry supports, designed to help businesses struggling with the loss of trade created by Brexit. The programme allows individual businesses to self-assess their exposures and risks and provides a range of interventions to match their needs.

In terms of budgets, allocations for 2018 will be made available in Budget 2018. I have highlighted various funding priorities for my Department for 2018 in my discussions with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, including Brexit related priorities.

Rail Services

566. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43023/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Airlines Regulations

567. **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. [42163/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Since Ryanair announced that it had made a commercial decision to cancel or suspend flights on a number of routes across its European-wide network, officials from my Department have been in regular

contact with all the relevant entities including Ryanair, the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) and the Irish Aviation Authority.

I have also been in direct contact with the airline's CEO and have expressed the Government's concerns at the disruption caused to passengers by these cancellations, and I will continue to engage with the CAR and the airline to ensure that all Irish passengers' rights are upheld and that any possible impact upon them is minimised.

The legal framework in relation to protection of air passenger rights in the event of cancellation, denied boarding and delay is set at European level and is governed by the provisions of EU Regulation 261 of 2004. This regulation provides for consumer protections which may include, depending on the circumstances arising, refund of airfares, re-routing either as soon as possible or at a later date at the passengers convenience, care and assistance and compensation.

The Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) is the independent regulator for the enforcement of air passenger rights for flights out of Ireland, functioning as the national enforcement body for such matters. The CAR has been working directly with Ryanair since the announcements were made to ensure that the provisions of the regulation 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 as necessary. 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 also recently replied to the UK CAA agreeing to meet its requirement for customer clarification on Ryanair's obligations under regulation 261, which are in line with those requested by the CAR.

I am satisfied that the Commission for Aviation Regulation is working to ensure that passengers are dealt with efficiently and effectively to minimise disruption to affected customers and to ensure that their consumer rights are fully protected.

Road Safety

568. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the 2017 ministerial committee on road safety meetings; the priorities for his Department for the autumn and winter term in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41980/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Ministerial Committee on Road Safety, which I chair, brings together the major stakeholders in working to make our roads safer, including my colleague the Minister for Justice, an Garda Síochána, the Attorney General, the Road Safety Authority, Transport Ireland Infrastructure, the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Health, the Medical Bureau for Road Safety and the City and County Management Association.

The Committee is tasked to meet every 6 months, but in response to the rise in road deaths

in 2015 and 2016, I decided that we should meet every 3 months to concentrate our efforts to reverse this trend. I am pleased to report that road deaths have decreased to date in 2017 by 16% on last year.

However, there is no room for complacency; every road death is one too many, and the Committee will continue working to reduce this figure further.

Unfortunately, the four main causes of road deaths continue to be speeding, intoxicated driving, using mobile phones and the non-wearing of seatbelts, all of which are preventable, and the Committee will continue to focus on these areas. Public awareness campaigns will also continue to focus on vulnerable road users, such as cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists, in an effort to make our roads safer for all. My immediate priority is to see the passage of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017, which deals with intoxicated driving, through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Road Traffic Legislation

569. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Road Traffic (Drink Driving - Fixed Penalty Notice) Bill 2017; when he expects this legislation to be brought before Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41982/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Bill referred to by the Deputy is now entitled the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017, and was published on 17 July of this year.

I regard this Bill as a significant measure to address an anomaly in the drink driving legislation so that all drivers who are detected driving over our existing legal limits, who opt not to have their cases heard in court, will receive a mandatory disqualification which reflects the seriousness and potentially devastating consequences of drink driving. I intend to bring this Bill before the Dáil as soon as possible. While a date has not yet been fixed, I expect this to be within the next few weeks.

Departmental Reports

570. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the regular multi-agency criminal justice, FCPS, working group with the Department of Justice and Equality; the status of this group and the implementation of the recommendations in the Garda Inspectorate's report, The Fixed Charge Processing System – A 21st Century Strategy of February 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41983/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Criminal Justice Fixed Charge Processing Group, jointly chaired by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality, includes officials from both Departments and representatives from the Road Safety Authority, an Garda Síochána, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Attorney General's Office, the Revenue Commissioners and the Courts Service.

The Group was established in 2014 in response to the Garda Inspectorate Report of that year, and meets every two months to progress and report on the various projects under its aegis.

Among the projects successfully implemented under the Group's guidance are the third payment option, whereby motorists on receipt of a summons for non-payment of a fixed charge are

now afforded a final chance to pay the charge and avoid a court appearance; work on the design of the Master Licence Record in the National Vehicle and Driver File, a three year project, commenced last year; and various measures to increase the rate of service of summons (which has risen from 57% in 2014 to 69% in 2016).

The Group is due to meet again in November 2017 for a Future Vision session, where new priorities will be identified and a work programme agreed.

Road Projects Expenditure

571. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the east-west link road investment project in County Cavan will be considered for additional capital funding to be announced by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40146/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Proposals to deliver an upgraded route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo. The latter would involve a route that passes through Northern Ireland.

In relation to the national element 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 under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The Capital Plan published in September 2015 provides for the gradual build up in expenditure on the maintenance and improvement of the road network over a 7 year period. The bulk of expenditure is scheduled to be spent on maintenance of the road network with some limited investment in new projects. My Department has provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design. At an estimated cost of €150 million, unfortunately it was not possible to include the East-West Link in the Capital Plan.

Rail Network Expansion

572. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the independent costing and review of the western rail corridor phase 2 between Athenry and Claremorris for passenger and freight use will be completed; the group appointed to carry out this independent costing; the terms of reference of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42194/17]

573. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps

he has taken, including contact with local authorities, along the western rail corridor to ensure that no measures are taken to prevent the future reactivation of the western rail corridor for rail use as set out in the McCann report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42195/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 572 and 573 together.

The Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to provide for an independent costing and review of the Western Rail Corridor Phase Two between Athenry and Claremorris for passenger and freight use.

The role of heavy rail in Ireland's transport sector is currently under review. The National Transport Authority (NTA) held a public consultation process to start a national debate on the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. The public consultation process was launched with the publication of a Rail Review 2016 Report, which examined the funding required to support the heavy rail network now and into the future, together with a consultation document "The Role of Rail in Ireland and Funding its Delivery".

Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA is preparing a report of those submissions, which I received in just the last couple of days and will now be examining.

As noted within the Rail Review Report, its analysis predates the finalisation of the National Planning Framework which is being developed at present under the leadership of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. Once agreed by Government, the approach which that Framework adopts toward land-use planning and settlement patterns for the country will have significant impacts on the potential of rail and other transport infrastructure and services into the future. No decisions have been made on future changes to the rail network, including any decisions relating to the Western Rail Corridor.

Finally, as the Deputy has pointed out, the Programme for Government also commits that no measures will be taken to prevent the future reactivation of the Western Rail Corridor for rail use. I will ensure that this commitment is fulfilled.

Greenways Development

574. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a greenway (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42226/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The extension of the Great Southern Trail to Tralee is a matter for Kerry County Council. Accordingly, the Council would be better placed to update the Deputy on progress.

I understand that Limerick County Council is also working on improving the quality of the Great Southern Trail and is also seeking to extend the route to Limerick City.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department recently undertook a public consultation process to inform the development of a new Greenways Strategy. My officials are currently reviewing the many submissions received from both citizens and stakeholders including those expressing support for the extension of the Great Southern Trail to Tralee. 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.

It is important that local authorities progress work in advance of this funding round as I anticipate that those projects that have feasibility, planning and design work completed will be in a better position to attract funding than those that do not.

Lobbying Data

575. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42298/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Since the commencement of the Lobbying Act 2015 from 1 September 2015, all lobbyists who come under the Act are required to register and to provide information regularly about their lobbying activities. The Deputy can access details of such activities at the following website <https://www.lobbying.ie>

In relation to the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill in particular, which is currently before Seanad Éireann, this proposed legislation is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Health. Insofar as it relates to sports matters, the proposals include a variety of measures such as:

- No sponsorship of competition/team/events for under 18s;
- No sponsorship (or advertising) if the audience is more than 20% children, accompanied by a Regulation-making power for the Minister for Health to reduce this audience percentage; and
- No sponsorship of motor sports.

The Bill is due to be amended in the Oireachtas in the coming months.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

576. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an application for sports capital funding by a club (details supplied) will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42307/17]

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.

Road Projects

577. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rea-

son traffic calming measures on the N18 and N17 at Annagh Cross, Ballyglunnin, such as signage along with footpaths for ease of access for local national school and residents have not materialised in view of the fact comprehensive presentation was made as requested by the council liaison engineer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42327/17]

596. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding compensation in respect of the N63 upgrade at Abbey Road, Abbeyknockmoy; the reason for delays regarding same; if his attention has been drawn to the lack of consultation between TII and landowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42448/17]

597. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if TII has communicated recent difficulties regarding flooding along the N63 at Abbey Road, Abbeyknockmoy; and his views on whether the design is robust against pluvial flooding and is future proofed. [42449/17]

598. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if lighting will be put in place at the Finns Cross, Ballyglunnin, junction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42450/17]

599. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if adequate lighting will be put in place at the Monastery Brooklodge church junction as part of new infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42451/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 577 and 596 to 599, inclusive, together.

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

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Greenways Development

578. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the public support that exists in east County Galway for the development of a greenway on the closed railway from Athenry to Tuam and on to Milltown (details supplied). [42328/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Strategic Investment Framework recommended the development of a new rail policy and last year the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann published the Rail Review Report 2016 on which the NTA held a public consultation. Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined. The NTA submitted a report of those submissions to me 2 days ago.

I will consider the report now and I will then bring it to Government. It is my intention that the report on the consultation should be published by the NTA following consideration by Gov-

ernment. In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines or investment in the company and its relevant infrastructure.

My Department recently undertook a public consultation process to inform the development of a new Greenways Strategy. A substantial number of submissions received in this process supported the development of the disused railway line from Athenry to Tuam and on to Milltown as a greenway. My officials are currently reviewing the many submissions received from both citizens and stakeholders. 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.

It is important that local authorities progress work in advance of this funding round as I anticipate that those projects that have feasibility, planning and design work completed will be in a better position to attract funding than those that do not.

Rural Transport Programme Data

579. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the report on rural transport as committed to on page 50 of the programme for government has been furnished to the relevant Houses of the Oireachtas committee; the date on which it was furnished; if the report was discussed at the committee; if the report is available to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42336/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In recognition of the value and benefit of rural transport to many communities, the Programme for a Partnership Government undertakes to examine how best to improve integration of services in the rural bus network within regions, and proposed that a report about this should be provided to the relevant Oireachtas Committee. Work on this matter is still underway, so such a report has not yet been provided to the Oireachtas Committee on Transport.

The Deputy may be aware that the National Transport Authority (NTA) – which operates under the aegis of my Department – has responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme, which now operates under the “Local Link” brand. Arising from the Programme for Government commitment for a report on rural transport, we asked the NTA to examine the way in which existing routes can be made more sustainable and accessible to the public and the potential for greater integration. The NTA has now provided material to my Department about the role and operation of the Local Link services in connecting rural dwellers to facilities and services in their area, and the potential for the future. This is now being examined and developed by my Department in the context of its wider work on review of public transport policy, as also committed to in the Programme for Government. Our intention is that there would be a report about rural transport matters for the Committee early in the new year.

Road Network

580. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if each road identified for upgrading or construction in the Government’s original capital plan 2016 to 2017 and in the amended version is based on the recommendation and prioritisation of TII only. [42378/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Given its role in re-

lation to national roads TII's input is taken into account in drafting capital expenditure programmes but TII does not have a policy role in relation to regional and local roads. As Minister, therefore, I have to take an overview of overall Departmental policy not alone regarding the national, regional and local road network but across all the sectors for which the Department is responsible in deciding capital expenditure priorities.

In light of the conclusions in the Department's SFILT, priority is being given to bringing maintenance and renewal expenditure back to the levels required to maintain our transport network adequately and this has meant that the scope for new projects is limited. Clearly as Minister I would like to be in a position to see more projects advance but I have to work within the budget available to me and this does impact on priorities.

Road Network

581. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be able to obtain inclusion in the capital programme of the most urgently required major road projects throughout the country with a view to facilitating free movement of traffic and adherence to highest possible safety standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42417/17]

582. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he has identified known accident black spots throughout the country on local or regional roads with a view to major or minor remedial works to alleviate the problem and improve the safety for all road users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42419/17]

583. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he has identified the most heavily trafficked arterial, regional or local routes with a view to provision of alternatives and in keeping with best safety standards and convenience for road users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42420/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 581 to 583, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Capital Plan sets out transport investment priorities to 2022. The 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 over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway. The Plan also provides for a limited number of road improvement projects to address specific issues such as bottlenecks and port connectivity.

Statutory responsibility for the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads lies with the relevant 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 a matter for the local authority. Similarly, within the budget available to it the prioritisation of expenditure in respect of national roads is a matter for TII.

Local authorities are responsible for mapping and collating available collision data on regional and local roads. Where analysis shows that engineering measures may assist in reducing the collision risk at a particular location then any local authority which is not fully self funding

in terms of roads (under the new Local Property Tax regime) may apply to my Department for funding under the Safety Improvement works programme. Each year monies are made available to local authorities for such works with priority given to works that are considered to be most effective in reducing collisions.

Collision data for national roads is mapped and collated by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

As regards the possibility of additional funding within the Plan period, I have sought extra funding for a package of measures under the Capital Plan Review process. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has, however, yet to decide on specific additional allocations.

Brexit Issues

584. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he has in mind provisions to avert the negative aspects of Brexit on the tourism industry here with particular reference to the need to ensure the maximisation under the circumstances of tourism from the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42421/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Since the UK voted to leave the EU, my department has been fully engaged in evaluating the ensuing risks for tourism and, together with the tourism agencies, working to address those risks. The department's analysis of the situation was greatly assisted by the All-Island sectorial meeting I hosted with the industry in January which examined the impact of Brexit on the tourism and hospitality sector. From a departmental perspective, we will continue our work across Government to ensure that our concerns are high on the agenda. For tourism, the priorities include maintaining a liberalised aviation regime, preserving the common travel area, avoiding a hard border and retaining British-Irish visa agreements for third countries.

The tourism agencies are engaged in the operational response to Brexit including the decline in numbers visiting from Great Britain. I have referred the Deputy's question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply on details of the actions being taken by them. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

585. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which potential exists for further development of the tourism sector, with particular reference to the need to encourage growth in the area most likely to be affected by global developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42422/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Government's Tourism Policy Statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" was launched in March 2015. The main targets contained in the Tourism Policy Statement, to be achieved by 2025, are as follows:

- Overseas tourism revenue to increase to €5 billion net of inflation, compared to €3.5 billion in 2014;
- Overseas visits to Ireland to increase to ten million, compared to 7.6 million in 2014; and
- 250,000 people to be employed in the tourism sector, compared to around 205,000 at pres-

ent.

In 2015, a Tourism Leadership Group was appointed to put in place a Tourism Action Plan containing key actions required in the period to 2018 in order to achieve the overall objectives in the Policy Statement. The Action Plan was published in January 2016 and contains actions across a range of key issues including skills in the tourism industry; supply of visitor accommodation; overseas tourism marketing; and the contribution of Local Authorities to tourism development. The Tourism Leadership Group which I chair, met on 21 September last and noted that the key actions are now completed or substantially completed. The Tourism Leadership Group will now start work on a future Tourism Action Plan for the period 2018 - 2020.

The promotion and development of tourism are primarily matters for the boards and management of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the tourism agencies for further reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

586. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the development of the tourism sector in all areas throughout the country with particular reference to the need to ensure steady growth of the sector throughout the island of Ireland having regard to the need to encourage the marketing of the entire island as a tourist venue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42423/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Government's Tourism Policy Statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" was launched in March 2015. The main targets contained in the Tourism Policy Statement, to be achieved by 2025, are as follows:

- Overseas tourism revenue to increase to €5 billion net of inflation, compared to €3.5 billion in 2014;
- Overseas visits to Ireland to increase to ten million, compared to 7.6 million in 2014; and
- 250,000 people to be employed in the tourism sector, compared to around 205,000 at present.

In 2015, a Tourism Leadership Group was appointed to put in place a Tourism Action Plan containing key actions required in the period to 2018 in order to achieve the overall objectives in the Policy Statement. The Action Plan was published in January 2016 and contains actions across a range of key issues including skills in the tourism industry; supply of visitor accommodation; overseas tourism marketing; and the contribution of Local Authorities to tourism development. The Tourism Leadership Group which I chair, met on 21st September last and noted that the key actions are now completed or substantially completed. The Tourism Leadership Group will now start work on a Tourism Action Plan for the period 2018 - 2020.

The promotion and development of tourism are primarily matters for the boards and managements of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the tourism agencies for further reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Tourism Data

587. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which various elements of the tourism sector have grown over the past five years; his plans for the future in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42424/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Statistics published by the Central Statistics Office show that in the five year period between 2011 and 2016, the number of overseas visits to Ireland increased by 47.3%. This increase can be broken down further as follows –

- 36.3% increase in visits from Great Britain
- 44.6% increase in visits from Mainland Europe
- 83.2% increase in visits from North America
- 54.2% increase in visits from Other areas

The Government’s Tourism Policy Statement “People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025” was launched in March 2015. The main targets contained in the Tourism Policy Statement, to be achieved by 2025, are as follows:

- Overseas tourism revenue to increase to €5 billion net of inflation, compared to €3.5 billion in 2014;
- Overseas visits to Ireland to increase to ten million, compared to 7.6 million in 2014; and
- 250,000 people to be employed in the tourism sector.

Tourism Data

588. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied regarding the availability of an adequate number of hotel and guest house beds to facilitate the growing tourism sector; if he plans particular initiatives in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42425/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Fáilte Ireland monitors the performance of tourist accommodation through regular occupancy surveys. This analysis indicates that while the country as a whole has sufficient stock of tourist accommodation, there are capacity constraints in areas of high tourist traffic at times of peak demand and additional capacity is required in certain parts of the country, particularly Dublin city.

In this context, Fáilte Ireland commissions periodic assessments of hotel accommodation in Dublin. Although the results confirm the current shortage, they also indicate that there should be sufficient stock - whether being developed currently or being planned - to meet projected demand in the future, with the bulk of new stock due to come on-stream after 2018.

With specific regard to factors within my Department’s and Fáilte Ireland’s remit, revised hotel Regulations were introduced last year in response to consumer preferences and in order to boost the economic rationale for investment in hotel development. The changes set out in these Regulations should make investment even more attractive by allowing hotel operators provide more rooms and operate at a lower cost base, thereby improving hotel capacity, competitiveness and profitability. Consumers should also benefit in terms of increased room capacity, competition and range of accommodation.

Tourism Promotion

589. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to promote and develop activity tourism such as the use of greenways throughout the country; if he expects further developments in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42426/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am keen to see the further development of greenways across the country, fully recognising the tourism potential, along with the economic and health benefits that greenways can bring to local communities. To that end my Department recently undertook a public consultation process to inform the new Greenway Strategy which is currently being developed. I was very impressed by the level of interest and the many submissions received from both citizens and stakeholders. The submissions are currently being reviewed by my officials. Bilateral meetings are also being held between senior officials and key stakeholders to discuss the structure and direction of the new Strategy which my Department is aiming to have completed by the end of the year. Following completion, it is expected that a new round of funding for greenway infrastructure will be announced.

I am confident that this new Strategy will create a solid basis for the ongoing delivery of greenways resulting in a significant contribution to activity tourism in Ireland.

Sports Capital Programme

590. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in position to meet the requirements of community-based sporting and recreational organisations in the context of major or minor allocations under the sporting capital grant scheme in 2017 and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42427/17]

591. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if is satisfied regarding the adequacy of sources of income for the funding of various capital sports projects throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42428/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 590 and 591 together.

The Sports Capital Programme is the primary means of providing Government funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. More than 10,000 projects have now benefitted from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to €911m. The programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improvements in the quality and quantity of sporting facilities in almost every area.

The 2017 round of the programme was open for applications from 23 January until 24 February 2017. 2,320 applications were received during that time seeking a total of €155m. This is the highest number of application ever submitted under the programme and is testament to the continued relevance of the programme to sports and community groups. The total amount currently available to allocate under the 2017 round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

Officials in my Department are finalising the assessment of all of the 2,320 applications received and I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the

coming weeks.

In relation to future capital funding for sports projects, my Department is currently finalising a review of national sports policy which includes a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities including large scale sports projects in the years ahead. It is hoped to publish the new Sports Policy later this year.

Sports Events

592. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding Ireland's application to host the rugby world cup in view of the availability of numerous stadia throughout the island; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42429/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On 25 September, the Taoiseach and I spearheaded the delegation that presented Ireland's bid to host the Rugby World Cup tournament in 2023. The delegation included, amongst others, Dick Spring, Chairman, Ireland 2023 Oversight Board; Philip Browne, Chief Executive, IRFU; David Sterling, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and Brian O'Driscoll, Ireland's Bid Ambassador.

Ireland has the capacity required to deliver a highly successful Rugby World Cup, with an ideal mix of stadia with varying capacities to cater for different tournament matches and located in the heart of our cities and communities. Five of these stadia have hosted international rugby before, and Croke Park is Europe's third largest stadium. The location, size and mix of our stadia would provide a unique atmosphere for a Rugby World Cup hosted in Ireland.

The decision regarding the successful bidder will be announced by World Rugby on 15 November 2017.

Tourism Data

593. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the tourism sector continues to attract business and conference tourism here, having particular regard to the use of the off season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42430/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. The development of individual tourism sectors such as business tourism is an operational matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Data

594. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the countries that feature most regularly in the marketing programme for tourism globally; the degree to which tourism growth is acknowledged from those countries or those showing lower visitor numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42431/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the Board and Management of Tourism Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

595. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which County Kildare, its historical houses, its racecourses and its heritage continue to be part of the marketing programme for tourism locally and nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42432/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of developing national tourism policy, while the tourism agencies have operational responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Questions Nos. 596 to 599, inclusive, answered with Question No. 577.

Child Care Qualifications

600. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a shorter add-on course to obtain a major award in child care rather than starting the course from the beginning for persons who have already achieved a component certificate in level six child care so their employer can be awarded the higher capitation rate for the ECCE programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42866/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department provides a qualifications assessment process for the Early Years sector, however my Department is not an awarding body nor an education provider.

If a person is unsure about the level of their award, or holds a component certificate for a further education award, they can contact Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) - who are the arbiter of award standards in Ireland for assistance in determining the status of their qualification.

My Department's role is to provide adjudication as to whether or not a qualification meets the minimum regulatory standard for the Early Years sector, or whether a qualification is suitable for a room leader at either standard or higher capitation level within the ECCE programme. My Department's remit only extends to what is required for its programmes, and what is required to meet the regulatory minimum for the Early Years sector.

Many third level education providers (Institutes of Technology, Universities, and some private education providers) have degree level programmes in Early Childhood Care and Education available, and all approved programmes are on a published list which is available for view on my Department's website.

I understand that some third level providers will accept further education awards for access to degree programmes, but it is recommended that individuals check with specific third level education providers as to their terms of access.

My Department is not in a position to recommend one third level programme over another.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

601. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the objectives of the commission of investigation into mother and baby homes; the actions that will be taken as a result of the commission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42604/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters was established by Government in 2015. Its objective is to provide a full account of what happened to women and children in these homes during the period 1922 to 1998. It is investigating the issues of significant public concern as set out in its terms of reference (S.I. 57 of 2015). The Commission is required to address seven specific questions on the practices and procedures relating to the care, welfare, entry arrangements and exit pathways for the women and children who were residents of these institutions. The appropriate actions to be taken will be determined following consideration of the final reports to be produced by the Commission at the conclusion of its work.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

602. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the location of the records for St. Patrick's mother and baby home, Navan Road, of births, deaths, procedural matters, State involvement and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42605/17]

603. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the location of the burial of the babies who died at St. Patrick's mother and baby home, Navan Road; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42606/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 602 and 603 together.

As I have previously stated to the Deputy, my Department does not hold any records from the institution known as St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home. A cohort of files from this former institution are held by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and may be accessed by relevant parties through their Information and Tracing Services. In relation to birth and death records from St Patrick's, the General Register Office is the central civil repository for records relating to births and deaths in Ireland.

As the Deputy may be aware, St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home is one of the institutions currently being investigated by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters. The Commission is required to address seven specific areas which include areas that the Deputy has raised. As part of its terms of reference the Commission is directed to investigate and to make a report on burial arrangements in respect of persons who were resident in these institutions. In the course of investigating these matters the Commission will identify the sources of information and records most relevant to these issues.

Child Care Services Staff

604. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to introduce a scheme, similar to the recently announced scheme whereby newly qualified accountants will receive a salary of almost €18,000, funded by Solas to fund newly qualified early years teachers to work in the sector in view of the serious staffing crisis in that sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42639/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I assume that this refers to the national apprenticeship system. In newer apprenticeships such as the one referenced by the Deputy, Solas or the Higher Education Authority meet the running costs and delivery of the off the job training element, but the employer pays the apprentice throughout the period of the apprenticeship, both on and off the job.

This scheme is under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills. I understand that the Apprenticeship Council issued a call for proposals for new apprenticeships in the Summer and that proposals received are currently under consideration in a process of evaluation under their auspices. The Council expects to report on the results of the call to the Minister for Education and Skills in November, with details of the proposals moving to development being announced by the Minister very shortly thereafter.

Currently the commitment by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills is to deliver a new workforce plan for the Early Years sector by the first quarter of 2018 (School Age Childcare Report). In this regard, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs has agreed to write a sectoral report on Early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce. As part of this work, the Secretariat to the Expert Group based in DBEI, has issued an RFT for a Skills Forecast for this Workforce Plan. The aim of this project is to examine the impact of a rapidly changing policy and practice landscape in the childcare sector in Ireland on future skills requirements so that Government can ensure that a high quality workforce is in place over the next decade.

Child Care Services Regulation

605. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the consequences facing crèches found to be non-compliant with the legislative requirement to only hire persons with a minimum FETAC level five; if conditions will be attached to their registration; if so, the conditions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42640/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm that on inspection a service which employs staff without the relevant qualifications will be found non compliant with Regulation 9(4). A condition will be attached to that service that all staff working directly with children must have the relevant qualification and the registered provider is afforded the opportunity to make representations as to how this will be addressed. Each representation is assessed on its own merits on a case by case basis.

Family Resource Centres

606. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to reinstate funds to a centre (details supplied); and the cost of reinstating funding. [42647/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I understand

that the Deputy's question pertains to the 2016 Childcare Regulations, which have impacted on the eligibility of Community Employment participants active within some childcare service providers.

€1m in funding has been made available to services that identify themselves as being impacted by staff eligibility changes within the 2016 Regulations. In order to avail of this funding, applicant services are required to satisfy the requirements of a standardised assessment framework. This framework is designed to ensure exchequer funds are being directed to providers facing significant financial challenges in respect of these regulatory changes, and who are therefore in the greatest need of once-off emergency funding from the exchequer.

I can confirm the service in question has applied for this stream of funding. However, during the assessment process it was identified that the service had achieved a considerable financial surplus over the preceding year. The specified application was therefore deemed not to have met all of the qualifying criteria, and my Department has therefore contacted the service informing them of the outcome of this assessment and offering them the opportunity to respond. My Department has received a response, and intends to review and revert regarding this response in due course.

Access to this stream of funding is strictly on condition of satisfying the assessment process. No funds in this respect have been deducted from the service in question, and my Department therefore cannot comment regarding reinstatement of same.

Youth Services Funding

607. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if additional funding for an organisation (details supplied) will be approved. [42650/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services, an increase of €5.5m on 2016. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to approve funding of €800,000 for the establishment of new youth projects and for the augmentation of a small number of existing youth services to meet new challenges arising from population increases. This additional investment is being provided in regions of the country where there is a pressing need for services to meet the needs of young people.

Each of the sixteen Education and Training Boards, including Laois and Offaly ETB, was invited to nominate locations within their catchment areas for the establishment of new services and to nominate a project or service to be considered for augmentation. In total twenty-eight applications for new services were received, including an application for a new service for Laois.

Based on the recommendations of a specially convened appraisal committee, and given the very limited resources available for the scheme, I approved the establishment of nine new tar-

geted youth services across the country and the expansion of a further seven to respond to new demand from increased population and needs of young people.

The application in respect of Laois was, unfortunately, not successful on this occasion. Should further monies be made available to my Department in the coming years, it is my intention to invite Education and Training Boards to nominate locations for the establishment of new services.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

608. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the budget allocation for early childhood education will be increased by a minimum of €250 million each year over the next five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42675/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department continues to invest significant resources in the early years sector. In Budget 2017 I secured a 35% increase in childcare funding, which was additional to a similar 35% increase in Budget 2016. These increases reflect the emphasis being placed on developing a quality service with appropriately supported staff.

Although my Department has been successful in securing additional funding for this sector over the past two budgets, as outlined above, I do acknowledge that much more must be done if we are truly to have affordable, accessible, quality childcare and continue to improve both the affordability and quality of childcare. To this end I am currently engaged with my Government colleagues with a view to securing additional investment for the childcare sector in Budget 2018.

Although it is my intention to continue to pursue further increases in investment in the childcare sector going forward, it would be premature at this juncture to speculate as to what fiscal space might be available in the budgetary years 2019-2022 to secure this.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

609. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the removal of the 15-hour standard hours subsidy proposal from the development of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42677/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are no plans in place to remove the proposed 15 hour standard hours subsidy from the Affordable Childcare Scheme. I want to ensure a balanced approach to eligibility for childcare subsidies under the Affordable Childcare Scheme. While a family's income will determine the amount of subsidy the family will qualify for, the parents' participation in work or training will determine the number of hours of subsidy available. When parents are engaged in work (including part-time work and labour market activation programmes) or in education or training, they will be eligible for an enhanced subsidy of up to 40 hours per week. When parents are not in work or training, childcare will be subsidised on a standard basis of up to 15 hours per week. I believe that this is a reasonable approach that reflects a balance of the labour market and child development objectives that will underpin the new scheme.

It will mean that this Scheme is open – albeit for standard hours rather than enhanced hours – to parents who are not taking part in work or training, but who choose to avail of up

to 15 hours of childcare per week. In the case of school going children, the child development objectives are met through school-going hours and, as such, the 15 standard hours of childcare applies to non-term time.

Early Childhood Care and Education

610. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will publish the national early years strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42682/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. The intention is to deliver a cross-cutting strategy which will take a joined-up, whole of Government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years (0-6 years). The drafting of the National Early Years Strategy is being advanced. An Open Policy Debate was held with key stakeholders last December and this has informed the strategy development greatly. Bilateral meetings with key government departments have taken place. Development of the Strategy remains a priority for me and for my Department, and I will move to publish the Strategy as soon as possible after it is completed.

Early Childhood Care and Education Staff

611. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on allocating €5 million to increase the 5% non-contact time for core staff being built into the proposed new affordable childcare scheme to 10%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42690/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Non-Contact Time payment for administrative and non-face-to-face work with children was first introduced as a measure in Budget 2017.

The purpose of the payment was to contribute towards the costs of the wide range of work carried out by providers, particularly the additional administration involved in changes to the childcare schemes in 2016-17, including the expansion of the ECCE scheme to include three intake points and the More Affordable Childcare measures introduced in September 2017. By the end of 2017 providers will have received a total of approximately €18m to assist with administration and non-contact costs associated with the schemes.

The Independent Review of Costs of Quality Childcare will examine the cost of providing quality childcare, including the cost of non-contact and administrative work. The review should therefore provide a strong evidence base which can inform future decisions in relation to funding levels for programme supports. The proposed affordable childcare scheme (ACS) subsidies and cost model for such programme supports are in development and will be examined further in the light of the findings of the review. As an update on Independent Review of Costs of Quality Childcare, I can report that Consultants have been appointed and the review is set to be completed in 2018.

Ministerial Responsibilities

612. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the powers she has delegated to the Ministers of State in her Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42774/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are no Ministers of State assigned to my Department.

Family Resource Centres

613. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if funding will be made available to family resource centres that require capital for infrastructural improvements. [42806/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are over 100 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) currently in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provides funding to the centres under an annual Agreement. This funding is provided by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres. The 2017 Tusla allocation to FRCs is €13.512m.

FRCs, funded by Tusla, provide a range of universal and targeted services and development opportunities that address the needs of vulnerable children and families. In seeking to improve outcomes and wellbeing for children and young people, Tusla must ensure that it makes the most efficient use of its resources in a way that is efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable.

While Tusla annual funding seeks to assist Centres in their day-to-day activities, additional once off funding of €1.422m was provided to Family Resource Centres in 2016 in order to assist in the upgrade of equipment and infrastructure.

The precise details of funding available to Family Resource Centres next year will be considered by Tusla in developing its 2018 Business Plan, based on the Performance Statement, which I as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will issue later this year.

Children in Care

614. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children's residential centres by county; and the amount each centre has cost in each of the years 2011 to 2016, in tabular form. [42821/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The latest figures from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, indicates that, at the end of July 2017, there were 6,272 children in care. Of these, 358 (6%) were in a residential placement of whom 209 were in a private residential centre run by a private body.

A child should be placed in a residential setting only when they have an identified need that can be met by this service or for an intensive assessment or provision of specialist services. In general, these centres are based in domestic style homes in the community, and staffed by social care workers to attend to the needs of the child. Specialist supports are also made available, as needed, and many centres have specialist skill-sets and therapeutic modalities.

Tusla does not collate data on residential care centres by county, but has provided the fol-

lowing information on the number of residential care centres by region for the years 2014 - 2016. Please note that data can only be provided since the establishment of Tusla in 2014. Payments to an organisation are based on the number of children in a centre or additionally, on the particular needs of individual children.

Number of Residential Care Centres by region 2014 - 2016

Year	Dublin Mid Leinster	Dublin North East	South	West	Total
Voluntary Residential Care Centres					
2014	9	13	6	0	28
2015	9	13	5	0	27
2016	9	13	4	0	26
Statutory Residential Care Centres					
2014	10	13	18	6	47
2015	9	13	15	5	42
2016	8	13	14	4	39
Private Residential Care Centres					
2014	20	17	15	11	63
2015	19	21	21	12	73
2016	22	25	25	11	83

Tusla has provided the following information on payments made to Residential Centres per year for 2014 - 2016.

Funding Provided to Residential Centres 2014 - 2016

Organisation / Centre Name	Region	Organisation Type	2014€	2015€	2016€
Private Supplier 1	Dublin North East - (1 centre)	Private	296,562	938,575	887,950
Private Supplier 2	Dublin North East - (4 centres)	Private	1,329,216	3,106,957	2,960,558
Private Supplier 3	West (2 centres) South (1 centre)	Private	4,395,240	13,291,170	13,433,520
Private Supplier 4	West (1 centre)	Private		2,766,666	3,350,000
Private Supplier 5	South (6 centres) Dublin North East - (4 centres)	Private	2,284,213	6,900,991	6,923,006
Private Supplier 6	Dublin North East - (2 centres)	Private	491,788	1,416,364	1,457,723
Private Supplier 7	Dublin North East - (1 centre) Dublin Mid Leinster - (7 centres) South (2 centres)	Private	1,756,743	4,746,344	5,471,865
Private Supplier 8	West (6 centres)	Private	797,063	2,446,054	2,790,884
Private Supplier 9	Dublin Mid Leinster - (1 centre)	Private			67,482

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Organisation / Centre Name	Region	Organisation Type	2014€	2015€	2016€
Private Supplier 10	South - (1 centre)	Private	284,571	703,929	738,643
Private Supplier 11	Dublin Mid Leinster - (1 centre)	Private	469,932	929,115	759,004
Private Supplier 12	Dublin Mid Leinster - (3 centres)	Private		2,766,666	3,350,000
Private Supplier 13	Dublin Mid Leinster - (1 centre) Dublin North East - (2 centres) South (3 centres)	Private	2,111,027	6,390,180	6,450,516
Private Supplier 14	Dublin North East - (1 centre)	Private	295,675	842,827	873,543
Private Supplier 15	Dublin Mid Leinster (1 centre)	Private	167,427	655,501	690,004
Private Supplier 16	Dublin Mid Leinster (3 centres)	Private		146,989	474,238
Private Supplier 17	Dublin Mid Leinster - (4 centres) South (9 centres) West (1 centre)	Private			9,130,541
Private Supplier 18	Dublin North East (2 centres)	Private	634,836	1,714,443	1,653,093
Private Supplier 19	Dublin North East (4 centres) Dublin Mid Leinster (1 centre)	Private	462,811	1,016,732	1,843,364
Private Supplier 20	South (2 centres)	Private	390,639	1,417,025	1,744,134
Private Supplier 21	Dublin North East - (1 centre)	Private	437,128	1,207,994	1,400,819
Private Supplier 22	Dublin North East (4 centres)	Private	3,240,741	6,863,377	5,844,498
Tusla Services	Dublin North East (12 centres)	Statutory	10,800,643	10,727,597	12,142,050
Tusla Services	Dublin Mid Leinster (8 centres)	Statutory	7,880,639	9,178,452	9,018,600
Tusla Services	South (11 centres)	Statutory	14,842,102	16,080,166	15,178,584
Tusla Services	West (4 centres)	Statutory	4,150,892	4,094,189	3,978,976
Tusla Services (Special Care)	National (3 centres)	Statutory	12,301,991	12,502,904	11,329,680

Organisation / Centre Name	Region	Organisation Type	2014€	2015€	2016€
Voluntary Supplier 1	Dublin North East - (1 centre)	Voluntary	1,006,795	1,130,160	1,047,742
Voluntary Supplier 2	Dublin North East - (2 centres)	Voluntary	1,430,771	1,754,217	1,526,992
Voluntary Supplier 3	Dublin North East - (2 centres)	Voluntary	1,348,748	1,236,351	1,351,584
Voluntary Supplier 4	South - (1 centre)	Voluntary	604,508	646,748	658,302
Voluntary Supplier 5	Dublin Mid Leinster- (2 centres)	Voluntary	1,675,116	1,670,933	1,670,933
Voluntary Supplier 6	Dublin North East - (1 centre)	Voluntary	698,346	701,696	729,643
Voluntary Supplier 7	Dublin Mid Leinster - (1 centre)	Voluntary		679,122	868,923
Voluntary Supplier 8	Dublin North East - (4 centres)	Voluntary	1,744,599	2,225,029	2,317,300
Voluntary Supplier 9	Dublin North East - (2 centres)	Voluntary	1,363,429	1,426,964	1,403,868
Voluntary Supplier 10	Dublin Mid Leinster - (1 centre)	Voluntary	1,842,416	1,978,271	1,978,271
Voluntary Supplier 11	South - (1 centre)	Voluntary	2,500,000	1,859,780	1,859,780
Voluntary Supplier 12	Dublin North East - (1 centre)	Voluntary	498,203	575,418	535,152
Voluntary Supplier 13	Dublin Mid Leinster (2 centres)	Voluntary	1,448,158	1,479,170	1,479,170
Voluntary Supplier 14	Dublin Mid Leinster (2 centres)	Voluntary	1,751,972	1,759,195	1,759,195

Child Protection

615. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department is adequately resourced to protect children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42822/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the protection and welfare of children and believe that there is a moral duty on Government and on society to work together to protect children and to ensure their safety. Within the limits of the budgetary process, I have sought to maximise the resources available for this important work and the effectiveness in the deployment of these resources.

From my Department's perspective Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving

adequate care and protection. Any child who resides in Ireland and who is not receiving adequate care and protection can be received into the care of the State if deemed to be the appropriate action required. Tusla is required under the 1991 Act to investigate allegations of abuse, including historical abuse, and to engage with An Garda Síochána where appropriate. Tusla has a key role in supporting some of the most vulnerable children and young people in State care. My Department provides funding for Tusla. In 2017 it has been allocated exchequer funding of €713 million, representing an increase of €37 million on 2016. Tusla provides a comprehensive range of services and supports for vulnerable children and families. These include child welfare and protection, including family support; educational welfare; pre-school inspection and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. These services and supports are provided by Social Workers, Educational Welfare Officers, and Early Years Inspectors. The precise level of funding available to services for children next year will be considered by Tusla in developing its 2018 Business Plan, based on the Performance Statement, which I as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will issue later this year.

National Youth Work Advisory Committee

616. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the Youth Advisory Council last met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42881/17]

620. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the national youth advisory body has not been properly constituted; her plans for same; the position regarding the involvement of the voluntary youth sector in the work of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42946/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 616 and 620 together.

Sections 17 and 18 of the Youth Work Act 2001 provide for the appointment of a National Youth Work Advisory Committee. The Committee had an advisory and consultative role to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in matters to do with youth work, including the coordination of youth work programmes and services. In line with these provisions, a new National Youth Work Advisory Committee was appointed by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with a term of office of one year with effect from 28 January 2013. The Committee had its final meeting on 26 November 2013. The Committee continued to work with my Department and assisted with the development of the new National Youth Strategy, in particular in identifying in what ways the youth work sector can contribute to shared policy objectives for young people.

The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 was published in, 2015. The implementation structures established by my Department under Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF), the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People oversee the roll out of the National Youth Strategy. There is no doubt that the youth work services have a significant contribution to make to realise the goals of the National Youth Strategy as part of a cross-sectoral, whole of society approach to supporting young people in their everyday lives. For this reason, the key youth sector interests are represented on the structures established by my Department to support the implementation of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. At national level, representatives of the voluntary youth services have been appointed to the Advisory Council of BOBF. At local level, youth sector representatives participate in the Children and Young People's Services Committees. Key Government departments and agencies that have an interest in children and young people and that had served on the National Youth Work Advisory Committee are represented on the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and on the Sponsors Group that

have been established under Better Outcomes Brighter Futures to drive the effective implementation of the policy framework.

There have been other significant policy and legislative developments that are relevant to the provision of youth services and the role of the National Youth Work Advisory Committee since the 2001 Act was passed. These include the introduction of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 which, inter alia, provides for a statutory function for Education and Training Boards in supporting the provision and assessment of youth work services at local level. The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020, which was published by my Department in June, 2015 is particularly relevant. I am deeply committed to ensuring that young people are involved in the preparation, planning and implementation of policies that impact on their lives.

In addition, my Department is fully committed to the reform of the many youth funding schemes. The Deputy will be aware that a number of targeted funding schemes supporting youth services were the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2014. The review made a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead. Work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department and consultations with youth services are continuing with a view to introducing the new youth funding programme in line with the review. The Deputy will also be aware that my Department has commenced a review of the Youth Service Grant Scheme. This review is intended to enhance its accountability, transparency and outcome measurement. It is also seeking to determine how best to meet the ever evolving needs of young people.

My Department works closely with the youth work sector, the voluntary youth services, the Education and Training Boards, other government departments and agencies and consults with young people themselves in the development and delivery of policies and services for children and young people.

For the above reasons, it is not my intention to reconvene the National Youth Work Advisory Committee while the reform process is ongoing. Given the seismic changes which have occurred over the past sixteen years, my Department will be revisiting the Youth Work Act, 2001 on the conclusion of the reform process, to ensure that it fully articulates the needs of young people in Ireland.

Youth Services

617. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of ETBs that have an integrated youth services programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42882/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has advised that a total of 41 School Completion Programme staff are employed directly by Education and Training Boards. An approximate further 30 School Completion Programmes receive administrative employment supports from Education and Training Boards.

Child and Family Agency Investigations

618. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla has received correspondence from concerned parents at a national school (details supplied); if so, the status and outcome of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42883/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla have advised that they received correspondence from parents at a national school in relation to matters of concern.

The matters were investigated in accordance with Tusla policy and an assessment was made. I can confirm that Tusla has advised that it considers the matter now closed.

Children in Care

619. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether the extension of a care order is in the best interest of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42884/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, may receive a child into care on a voluntary basis or following an application to the Courts. There are a range of orders provided for under the Child Care Act 1991, as amended. Decisions on the variation or discharge of a care order are a matter for the relevant Court and I am not in a position to comment on these.

The application for a care order is a serious step and Tusla makes every effort to identify supports or actions that could act as an alternate approach. Tusla engages with parents and children in the preparation of an application for a care order, except where this is not possible or it may not be appropriate under the circumstances. The Court may seek a range of reports or the assistance of a Guardian ad Litem before coming to a decision.

Question No. 620 answered with Question No. 616.

Youth Services Funding

621. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a grant application by an organisation (details supplied) will be decided upon. [42947/17]

625. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on funding an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42978/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 621 and 625 together.

In 2017, funding of €57.4m has been provided to my Department for various youth schemes, an increase of €5.5m over 2016. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme, amounting to €10.65m in 2017, under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. This funding is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people.

Scouting Ireland receives grant aid on an annual basis under the Youth Service Grant Scheme. Details of the funding allocated to Scouting Ireland by my Department since its establishment in 2011 are outlined in the table.

Youth Service Grant Scheme	Year	Grant €
	2017	876,337
	2016	834,607
	2015	814,250
	2014	814,250
	2013	845,974
	2012	939,971
	2011	1,005,317

In addition to the above, Scouting Ireland was allocated €150,000 in current funding in 2015 and a further €200,000 in Dormant Accounts funding in 2016 to support the Operation Lelievlet youth employment initiative.

Scouting Ireland also received €49,630 under the capital funding scheme for youth projects and services in 2016 to fund the improvement of disability access and security at Scouting Ireland.

In 2015 €30,000 was also allocated to Scouting Ireland to assist it with its budget sustainability to the year end.

In addition to the grant funding provided to Scouting Ireland in 2017 an additional application for funding has been received for funding for its AcadaMoot Programme and this application is currently under consideration within my Department.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

622. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the difficulties being experienced by a crèche (details supplied) in County Dublin regarding the administration of the new affordable childcare scheme will be investigated; if payments will be backdated on resolution of the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42968/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): With regards to the details supplied by the Deputy, I understand that officials from my Department have been in contact with this service provider and this issue has been resolved to the provider's satisfaction. The payments will be backdated to the date the child is registered as having commenced accessing the subvented childcare scheme and is attending. If this service provider has any further queries I would advise them to email eyqueries@dca.gov.ie.

Youth Services

623. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on maintaining the voluntary sector's role in delivering local youth services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42975/17]

624. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on ensuring that the voluntary sector is part of the organisation and funding of youth work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42976/17]

626. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on increasing the funding for the local youth club grant in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42979/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 623, 624 and 626 together.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

Earlier this year I approved the launch of an updated and improved Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and from 2017, the scheme incorporated the National Quality Standards for volunteer led youth groups. The scheme was designed to provide volunteer led youth activities at a local level for young people aged between 10 to 21. Grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. The scheme is open to new entrants and is advertised locally. Applications for funding are invited by the Education and Training Boards from local groups in their respective areas. Each year, more than 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme. In 2016, €1.065m was allocated to this scheme. In 2017, I have provided an additional 10% in funding to the scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.1715.

In recognition of the contribution which volunteer led clubs/groups have on our young people I was pleased to have been able to make €6.35m in additional funding available this year in the form of the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme. The primary focus of this scheme will be to assist volunteer led clubs/groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme will allow for the purchase of equipment for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items.

The question of additional investment in the youth services will be considered in the context of the resources that are made available to my Department in the Estimates and Budgetary process and my Department's priorities for the future development of the services for young people, in line with the National Youth Strategy.

Question No. 625 answered with Question No. 621.

Question No. 626 answered with Question No. 623.

Child Care Services Provision

627. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of a facility (details supplied). [43021/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, my Department does not directly provide childcare - rather we fund the provision of childcare through individuals, companies and community/not-for-profit groups. Therefore, fol-

lowing the closure of the existing childcare provider in this location, I requested that Pobal and Longford CCC work with local bodies and potential partners in relation to the re-establishment of a service for the local community. I also made once-off funding available in this respect.

Unfortunately, my Department has yet to receive a viable proposal for the creation of a childcare service in this area. Pobal and Longford CCC are therefore still pursuing options locally in this regard. Once-off funding remains in place, and I am open to receiving proposals from local/community groups who may be in a position to assist.

After-School Support Services

628. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there are supports for community child-care facilities to pick up children for provision of after school care; and if not, if she will review same. [43022/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy will be aware my Department provides subvention through a number of childcare schemes. Two of these schemes:

- Childcare Education and Training (CETS) which provides childcare to eligible participants on certain training courses provided by Education and Training Boards, and secondary school students

- After-school Child Care Programme (ASCC) for parents of primary aged children on certain DSEAP employment programmes

include provision for enhanced subvention rates to cover transport requirements.

In financial terms, this means that for 5 days provision per week, the parents fees (not counting the initial 14 week top up that applies) can be subvented by €35 extra per week to cover transport.

In addition, on the 17th of August this year I announced €1.2m of funding to improve existing school age childcare services. As a result, 263 after school services benefitted from grants from my Department. Some of these grants were put towards after school services purchasing vehicles to facilitate the pick up and drop off of school aged children from their services.

Lobbying Data

629. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of occasions on which she has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons she has met; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; her views on the issues raised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42285/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy, that in the time period referred to, I have received two written representations with regard to the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, from the Chief Executive of the Licensed Vintners Association and from the Co-ordinator of the Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign both strongly supporting the main provisions of the Bill. I responded to both letters with thanks for receipt of same. I have held no meetings with persons or bodies in relation to this matter.

Youth Services Funding

630. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the allocation made to youth work services over each of the past ten years, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42352/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drugs Task Force Projects and certain other programmes including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres.

Details of the funding provided to youth services and projects by my Department since its establishment in 2011 are not readily available in the format requested by the Deputy. The funding for the provision of youth services is administered on behalf of my Department by a number of funding administrative bodies. In the main, these are the Education and Training Boards.

Information on the allocations provided to youth services by receiving organisations in each of the years 2011 to 2017 has been forwarded to the Deputy.

Foster Care Provision

631. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 251 of 28 September 2017, when the examination is likely to be published in view of the possibility that the use of private foster providers of emergency care placements may be unlawful. [42373/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, in May I welcomed the publication of Dr Geoffrey Shannon's audit into the use of section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991 by An Garda Síochána. The report was undertaken by Dr Shannon on behalf of An Garda Síochána and correspondingly most of the recommendations made by Dr Shannon relate to Garda practice and procedures.

In my previous reply to the Deputy on this matter I mentioned that a number of recommendations were made by Dr Shannon which merit further consideration by my Department, and my officials have examined such matters. Clarification has been sought from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, regarding the Agency's procedures in relation to the use of private providers of emergency foster care placements, and is awaited. When this clarification has been received, my Department, in conjunction with the Child and Family Agency, will consider what further action, if any, on this matter is required.

While my officials are currently awaiting the Agency's response, based on the information currently available it would appear that there is no legal difficulty in placing children with a private not for profit provider where that child has been received into the care of the Child and Family Agency by way of an emergency placement under section 12 (4) of the Child Care Act 1991.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Administration

632. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to put new tenders in place for the SICAP programme; his further plans to tender for the provision of this programme in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42802/17]

633. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if tendering for the next SICAP programme will be focused on the needs of rural communities; if facilities will determine the location of services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42803/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 632 and 633 together.

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The Programme was rolled out in April 2015, and will run until 31 December 2017. Its aim is to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders. The SICAP funding allocation, for front-line delivery, for 2017, is €37.5m, which includes an allocation of €3m under the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

SICAP is a key intervention for the harder to reach, with delivery in each area (or Lot) overseen and managed by the relevant Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in each local authority area. The programme is currently delivered in a total of 51 Lots, and it targets both rural and urban areas. The number and configuration of the Lots was decided upon by the LCDCs, based on their considerable knowledge of their local areas.

LCDCs bring a more joined-up and coherent approach to the local management of publicly funded programmes in the areas of economic, social and community development, including SICAP, through the development and implementation of the community elements of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). It is for the LCDCs to target and plan their strategy in accordance with local need and the contents of their LECP. Whilst complying with the programme's aims, objectives and requirements, Programme Implementers are expected to ensure that actions set out under SICAP reflect the priorities and needs identified in the community aspect of the LECP, which emerged from extensive local consultation processes.

The next iteration of the programme, SICAP 2018-2022 is due to supersede the current programme with effect from 1 January 2018. The programme has been refined to allow LCDC's to include their own 'emerging needs' group to more efficiently target supports within their Lot area. As with the current programme and in accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP 2018-2022 is subject to a public procurement process which is currently underway. The national procurement process is a competitive process that is open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. The process is managed within each Lot area by the relevant LCDC. The process is the same for every County. Given the deliberative process, currently underway, I am not in a position to comment further.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

634. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the reason the local improvement scheme allocation to Tipperary County Council was smaller and in some cases half of what was allocated to other smaller counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42922/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): On 21st September, I announced the provision of €10 million for a Local Improvement Scheme. 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.

Within the budget available for 2017, it was not possible to fully support the level of projects that the Local Authorities indicated they could deliver in 2017. However, all eligible Local Authorities received a minimum of €250,000, with the exception of three Authorities who requested less than that amount. Tipperary Co. Council was one of those which requested less than €250,000.

The total value of submissions received from Tipperary County Council was €237,579 and a sum of €237,000 was allocated to them. The Council was therefore one of the few Local Authorities which received almost all of the funding requested.

Local Improvement Scheme Administration

635. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a local authority is required by departmental guidelines to advertise publicly the local improvement scheme before particular works are agreed or completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42923/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): On 21st September, I announced the provision of €10 million for a Local Improvement Scheme 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.

Within the budget available for 2017, it was not possible to fully support the level of demand which the Local Authorities stated they could deliver in 2017. However, all eligible Local Authorities received a minimum of €250,000, with the exception of three Authorities who requested less than that amount. The allocations generally had regard to the geographical area of the counties and the level of demand indicated by the Local Authorities.

It is now a matter for each Local Authority to decide which works should be completed from the list of potential projects submitted to my Department, and having regard to the funding allocated to them. Local Authorities are not specifically required by Departmental guidelines to advertise the LIS scheme publicly before particular works are agreed or completed.

Banking Sector

636. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development

when the interdepartmental report into the provision of public banking will be published. [42953/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, based on particular overseas models.

My officials have been working actively with the Department of Finance over the last number of months to progress these commitments. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies were received from a range of stakeholders and all submissions have been reviewed and considered.

The Departmental officials are currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a local public banking model in Ireland. Their work is now nearing completion and a report will be submitted to me and to the Minister for Finance shortly for consideration. I envisage that the report will be submitted to Government for consideration prior to any decision regarding publication.

Charities Regulation

637. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to ensure the Charities Regulator is fully resourced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42977/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Charities Regulatory Authority (“Charities Regulator”) was established on 16 October 2014, pursuant to the Charities Act, 2009. Since its establishment, significant progress has been made in resourcing the Regulator, from a staff number of 10 on establishment day to 30 at the end of 2016. The current staff count is some 40.

The 2017 budget for the Regulator is €4,379,000, an increase of 64% on the available spend in 2016. This increased level of funding includes provision to increase the staff levels to 50 and my Department is committed to working with the Regulator to achieve its full approved staffing complement of 50 as soon as possible.

Ministerial Functions

638. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42786/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Rural and Community Development (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order (S.I. No 432 of 2017) of 3 October 2017 delegates the following functions to my colleague, Mr. Sean Kyne, T.D., Minister of State:

- in the area of Rural Development, responsibility for the oversight of the work of the Western Development Commission and the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce;

- Functions related to the Department's inputs on Rural Broadband and the National Planning Framework,

- overview of the following funding schemes – (i) Dormant Accounts Fund/statutory responsibility for Disbursement Scheme as well as for the administration of certain Dormant Account funded measures, (ii) the programme of Support National Organisations (SSNO), and (iii) Community & Voluntary Funding Schemes (CFS),

- the development of the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and Citizen Engagement policy, the Forum on Philanthropy and the Social Innovation Fund Ireland,

- responsibility for the Charities Regulatory Authority (excluding the appointment of members to the Board of the Authority), and

- the responsibility for the Control of Dogs Acts

The Minister of State will also be responsible for identifying and advising on issues affecting rural communities including the business community, arising from Britain's exit from the European Union.

Departmental Schemes

639. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will reintroduce the funding scheme that was previously available to support the installation of three phase electricity for rural businesses; and the supports available for a business seeking for this service. [42941/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR scheme previously provided funding to support micro enterprises to convert from single phase to three phase electricity. However, the scheme was closed for new applications in 2009.

In addition, the former Farm Electrification Grant Scheme (FEGS) provided support for the installation of three phase electricity supply on farms. I understand that this scheme ceased operation towards the end of 2011.

I currently have no plans to reintroduce either scheme.

Departmental Funding

640. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of moneys prepaid by his Department for all schemes to local authorities towards the close of 2016 for work to be carried out in 2017; the amount of expenditure allocated to each county, by programme; the expenditure that had been incurred up to the end of September in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43005/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As part of the Government's programme to support rural development, a number of initiatives including CLÁR, the Rural Recreation Scheme, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, and REDZ (Rural Economic Development Zones) were launched by my Department during 2016. In general, these initiatives were implemented through the Local Authorities.

All funding was made available in line with the sanction received from the Department of

Public Expenditure and Reform and on the basis of funding agreements signed with the Local Authorities.

The table below details the amount of funding allocated to each Local Authority by scheme in 2016 and the amount of expenditure incurred by each Local Authority up to the end of August 2017. It will be noted that not all Local Authorities applied for, or were eligible for, each scheme.

This is the latest expenditure information available at this time. However, my Department is engaging with the Local Authorities on an on-going basis to update the expenditure information.

County	Total amount disbursed REDZ 2016	REDZ 2016 Total Total Department REDZ Grant spent by LA at the 31st Aug 2017	Total amount paid Town and Village Renewal Scheme	Town & Village Total Department Grant spent by LA at the 31st Aug 2017	Total amount disbursed CLAR 2016 Scheme	Total Department Grant spent by LA at the 31st Aug 2017 CLAR	Total amount disbursed Rural Recreation Scheme Local Authorities 2016	Rural Rec Total Department Grant spent by LA at the 31st Aug 2017
Carlow	€200,000	€115,996	€380,000	€378,206	€80,000	€80,000	€67,500	€4,000
Cavan	€200,000	€40,000	€380,000	€57,000	€498,184	€109,082	€45,567	€21,361
Clare	€200,000	€28,736	€380,000	€244,566	€284,000	€93,719	€255,625	€65,000
Cork	€248,000	€172,700	€380,000	€55,878	€562,222	€133,835	€417,815	€83,179
Donegal	€298,000	€39,931	€380,000	€0	€878,632	€159,837	€67,991	€49,811
Dublin FIN-GAL DLR	€0	€0	€380,000	€270,254	€0	€0	€33,667	€0
Galway	€100,000	€3,330	€380,000	€254,656	€392,000	€327,656	€248,950	€107,171
Kerry	€150,195	€150,195	€380,000	€368,221	€744,964	€529,572	€288,000	€106,440
Kildare	€100,000	€5,000	€380,000	€122,945	€0	€0	€0	€0
Kilkenny	€200,000	€0	€380,000	€232,795	€223,000	€99,973	€0	€0
Laois	€200,000	€28,856	€380,000	€143,940	€148,900	€134,500	€256,000	€200,000
Leitrim	€300,000	€56,799	€380,000	€374,910	€274,800	€208,800	€480,000	€24,964
Limerick	€300,000	€0	€380,000	€297,840	€235,000	€214,000	€291,250	€220,000
Longford	€350,000	€171,000	€380,000	€380,000	€237,560	€124,551	€190,000	€60,000
Louth	€100,000	€0	€380,000	€366,845	€173,520	€111,131	€0	€0
Mayo	€150,000	€108,906	€380,000	€375,250	€976,869	€464,332	€455,000	€367,018
Meath	€200,000	€48,440	€380,000	€298,260	€127,600	€122,546	€50,000	€50,000
Monaghan	€290,000	€55,968	€380,000	€375,250	€356,440	€317,958	€273,014	€155,347
Offaly	€414,870	€10,350	€380,000	€37,521	€123,398	€84,357	€172,959	€0
Roscommon	€100,000	€100,000	€380,000	€263,446	€406,497	€394,349	€0	€0
Sligo	€800,000	€312,000	€380,000	€380,000	€598,400	€384,512	€42,563	€42,563
Tipperary,	€699,221	€251,499	€380,000	€265,820	€371,000	€268,099	€85,208	€14,388
Waterford	€100,000	€0	€380,000	€380,000	€261,600	€233,809	€0	€0
Westmeath	€192,000	€15,330	€380,000	€304,900	€214,280	€57,527	€219,590	€48,671
Wexford	€100,000	€15,325	€380,000	€300,114	€0	€0	€189,455	€82,740
Wicklow	€150,556	€21,304	€380,000	€202,083	€70,000	€5,675	€0	€0
Total	€6,142,842	€1,751,665	€9,880,000	€6,730,700	€8,238,866	€4,659,820	€4,130,154	€1,702,652

Departmental Offices

641. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the location of the headquarters of his Department; the number of civil servants based there; the number of civil servants based in each location where his Department has an office; the town in which each one of these offices is located; the reason that the headquarters of his Department is not located in a rural area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43006/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Rural and Community Development was established 19 July 2017. As of 10 October 2017, there was 109 staff employed in my Department, although discussions are ongoing to finalise the Department's full staffing complement.

There is currently 41 staff in the Department's core offices in Dublin, and 60 in Ballina. There is 8 staff in an Inspectorate service that is based regionally throughout the country.

A further 42 staff are employed in the Charities Regulatory Authority, which is also based in Dublin.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

642. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the charitable status of an organisation (details supplied); and the timeframe for the number to be issued. [42199/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I am advised that the organisation referred to by the Deputy does not appear on the Register of Charities and therefore is not a registered charity. The Register of Charities is publicly available for inspection on the Charities Regulator's website *www.charitiesregulator.ie*.

Under the Charities Act 2009 the Charities Regulator is independent in the performance of its functions. It is the policy of the Charities Regulator not to comment to third parties in relation to specific applications for registration because to divulge information to a third party could prejudice a future decision. My Department has no function in this matter.

Lobbying Data

643. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42297/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Since the establishment of my Department, the Department of Rural and Community Development, in July this year, I have not been lobbied in relation to the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. However, on 5 October last, correspondence was received to my office from the Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association (CSNA) in relation to the Public Health Alcohol Bill (2015) Section 20 amendments. My office will be responding shortly.

Regional Development Policy

644. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the functions of his Department extend to ensuring balanced regional development; his views on a recent EUROSTAT report that states that over 50% of development is in the Dublin region; his plans to ensure balanced regional development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42347/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, on behalf of the Government, is currently coordinating the preparation of a new National Planning Framework for Ireland to guide national, regional and local planning and investment decisions for the years ahead. The Minister has published a draft of the Framework, “Ireland 2040 - Our Plan”, for public consultation.

The National Planning Framework will, amongst other issues, address the future development direction of our cities, towns and rural areas. In this context, Ireland 2040 underpins two key policy initiatives which come under the remit of my Department - the Government’s Action Plan for Rural Development which is seeking to maximise the economic and social potential of rural Ireland, and the Framework Policy for Local and Community Development which seeks to create vibrant, sustainable and self-determining communities across Ireland.

I and my Department are actively involved in the development of the Framework with a particular focus on ensuring that development is balanced and recognises the contribution of the regions to the long term sustainable economic growth of Ireland.

My Department is also responsible for progressing the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) proposal, which aims to contribute to effective regional development by creating sufficient scale along the western part of Ireland to attract additional business investment, to grow jobs and to support vibrant local communities.

Earlier this year, I established a Taskforce to progress the AEC proposal. The Taskforce comprises representatives from the business sector, key Government Departments, public bodies, and the Third Level sector.

In addition, my Department has responsibility for oversight of the Western Development Commission, which has a particular remit in relation to the economic and social development of a number of specific counties in the western region. These are counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare.

Local Authority Functions

645. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the measures he plans to put in place to ensure that local authorities are prepared for the roll-out of broadband once the tender process is concluded; the cost of the measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42348/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which was published last December, recommended the assignment by each Local Authority of an officer with responsibility for broadband and mobile phone services. The function of this officer is to act as a single point of contact for telecommunications operators on the roll-out of telecommunications infrastructure, as well as to increase awareness of, and stimulate demand for, broadband services.

The Department of Rural and Community Development has provided funding to all 31 Local Authorities to co-fund the assignment of a Broadband Officer.

The remit of the Broadband Officer is primarily to manage interactions with any company that is seeking to roll out telecommunications infrastructure in their county. The Broadband Officers will also work with the winning bidder(s) in respect of the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan in the areas to be covered by State intervention. Broadband Officers are also involved in helping to develop local digital strategies to ensure that full use is made of the new

broadband infrastructure once it is in place.

The telecommunications providers have widely welcomed the assignment the Broadband Officers by the Local Authorities and are actively engaging with them.

The Department of Rural and Community Development has, additionally, established two Regional Action Groups involving all Local Authorities to ensure consistency in their engagement with the telecommunications operators and to identify and address obstacles to the roll-out of telecoms infrastructure. A number of sub-groups have been established to progress individual work items associated with the roll-out of high-speed broadband.

The appointment of Broadband Officers is just one of 40 actions contained in the report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. An implementation group has been established to oversee the delivery of the Taskforce recommendations. Progress Reports from the Implementation Group are published on a quarterly basis, with the third report due shortly.

Action Plan for Rural Development

646. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to commission research on the impact of Brexit on rural communities as committed to in the Action Plan for Rural Development; when this research will be commissioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42349/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action Plan for Rural Development, which was published in January of this year, envisaged that a piece of research would be commissioned on the impact of Brexit on rural areas.

Since the publication of the Action Plan, a number of papers and commentaries have been published on the potential impact of Brexit on Ireland, including rural Ireland. In addition, a number of sectorial workshops on the issue have been held with local communities and other stakeholders by several Government Departments, including the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

In light of these developments, I do not propose to commission the carrying out of further research on the impact of Brexit at this time. However, the Government is continuing to work, through various State agencies, to provide support and advice to businesses on how to prepare for and address the possible impacts of Brexit.

Seniors Alert Scheme

647. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding allocation for the senior alert scheme over each of the past ten years; the number of beneficiaries of the scheme per year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42350/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme, which encourages support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of equipment i.e. a personal alarm and/or pendant, which is provided to the elderly person participating, while the associated monitoring and service charges are the

responsibility of the individual participant.

The scheme commenced in 2010, replacing the Scheme of Community Support for Older People. The allocations provided from 2010 to 2017 and number of beneficiaries in each of these years are outlined in the following table.

The scheme is administered on my Department's behalf by Pobal. Following a recent review of the scheme, a new version of the Seniors Alert Scheme will be launched shortly.

.	Allocation €000s	Beneficiaries
2010	1,948	6,306
2011	2,436	7,910
2012	2,524	9,142
2013	2,321	10,597
2014	1,706	7,120
2015	1,539	6,705
2016	1,800	7,301
2017	2,300	4,558

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

648. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which Kildare County Council can apply for and obtain funding under the local improvement scheme in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42418/17]

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, including Kildare Co. Council, in August to establish the level of demand for an LIS scheme this year. The Local Authorities were advised that any request for funds would be subject to their capacity to complete the proposed works in 2017, and funding availability.

Kildare Co. Council indicated that they would not be requesting funding under the LIS for 2017.

The level of funding available for the LIS scheme in 2018 will be considered in the context of the 2018 Budget and Estimates process. If funding for the scheme is available in 2018, I anticipate that the scheme will again be open to applications from all eligible Local Authorities, including Kildare Co. Council.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

649. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the basis on which a decision to refuse a request for clothing allowance was made in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42492/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) on 4th September 2017. The application was refused as it was considered reasonable that they could provide clothing

from their total household income. Their means were in excess of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate. The legislative basis for this decision is Section 201 - Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

The person concerned has been advised of their right to seek a review of this decision.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

650. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a mortgage repayment to a lending institution paid by person living apart from their spouse on a property in both their names and in which the spouse lives would impact on the calculation of the spouse's entitlement to jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42506/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that, in the assessment of means for jobseeker's allowance, account shall be taken of any property owned other than the family home, other capital such as savings, and any income including non-cash benefits. Non-cash benefits are defined in legislation as "the net cash value to the person of his or her annual housing costs actually incurred and paid by a liable relative insofar as the cash value exceeds €4,952 per annum ."

A spouse or civil partner is a liable relative. Accordingly, in the case where a mortgage is being paid by a spouse who is living apart from a claimant, this will be assessed as means.

It should be noted that mortgage payments are considered as maintenance payments for means testing purposes. Maintenance payments are assessed at 50% when in excess of €95.23 per week (€4,952 per annum). These arrangements ensure that there is always an incentive to receive a maintenance payment.

Public Services Card

651. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the value of the contract with a company (details supplied) to produce the public services card; the funding it has received to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42511/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The contract with Biometric Card Services (BCS) was signed in December 2009. The value of this contract was just under €18.3 million (excluding VAT) for the production, personalisation and distribution of 3 million Public Service Cards (PSC) plus associated help desk services. To date BCS have been paid €22.9 million (excluding VAT). The increase in costs arises from changes to processes, enhancements/improvements to the security of the card, and from delays impacting the timetable for production of the cards. Following the award of the contract, the then Data Protection Commissioner requested that each recipient of a PSC should contact the helpdesk as proof that the PSC had been delivered correctly. This increased the helpdesk costs from €347,000 (excluding VAT) as per the contract, to payments to date of €2.597 million (excluding VAT). Security features for cards have improved and been enhanced over the lifetime of the contract. To ensure that the PSC met the best international security standards, a Kinegram was added at a total cost of €1.140 million excluding VAT. Extending the contract period to the end

of 2017 from end 2016 resulted in an increased price per card amounting to approx. €0.5 million to date excluding VAT. Costs associated with the deployment of the free travel variant of the PSC in 2012 amounted to just over €700,000 excluding VAT.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card Data

652. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the information that the public services card holds; and the information that the public services card has the capacity to hold. [42514/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The data that may be displayed and/or electronically stored on the Public Services Card (PSC) is set out at sections 263 (1A) and section 263 (1B) respectively of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended). The following sets out where each data item appears or is stored on the PSC:

- the name of the person: Face of PSC and Chip
- the personal public service number (PPSN) of that person: Rear of PSC, Chip, and Magnetic stripe
- a photograph of that person: Face of PSC and Chip
- the signature of that person: Face of the PSC and Chip
- the issue number of the public services card: Rear of the PSC and Chip
- the expiry date of the PSC: Face of the PSC and Chip
- the date of birth of that person: Chip and Magnetic stripe
- the place of birth of that person: Chip
- the sex of that person: Chip and Magnetic stripe
- the nationality of that person: Chip
- all former surnames (if any) of that person: Chip
- all former surnames (if any) of the mother of that person: Chip.

Like all smart cards the PSC has the capacity to hold data in any electronic format and for any purpose. However, as stated above, only data that is provided for in sections 263 (1A) and 263 (1B) can currently be displayed and stored on the card. Any proposal to change this would require amendments to primary legislation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility

653. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has considered the independent review of the changes to the one-parent family pay-

ment which was agreed to during the passage of the Social Welfare Act 2016; her plans regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42531/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Act 2016, enacted on 19 December 2016, included a commitment that a review of the changes to the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) scheme since January 2012 would be laid before the Houses of Oireachtas within 9 months of the enactment of the Act.

The review was to assess the financial and social effects of the OFP changes taking into account the effects on welfare dependency and the poverty rates of those affected. The scope of the review included the long-term age-related policy changes to the scheme that were implemented since January 2012, in addition to the shorter term changes required to achieve savings across all social welfare expenditure over the same period on foot of the economic downturn.

In order to complete the review, Indecon carried out a detailed quantitative and econometric analysis of a number of relevant datasets to assess the impact of the changes on lone parents. The review also included one of the largest surveys targeting one-parent families in Ireland, with 33,000 lone parents surveyed. Responses were received and analysed from almost 3,700 lone parents who were directly affected by the changes. This provided an excellent opportunity to gather the views and experiences of lone parents affected by the changes.

I have received the review and I laid it before the Houses of the Oireachtas on Monday 9th October 2017, as provided for in the Social Welfare Act, 2016. I welcome a number of positive findings in the Review:

- The policy changes introduced have been successful in increasing employment and in reducing welfare dependency – the reforms increased the probability of both employment and of higher employment income.
- Responses to the survey showed that the percentage of lone parents in full-time employment increased from 15% to 22%.
- Welfare dependency rates fell in the year after One-parent Family Payment was lost, and continued to fall in subsequent years.

I believe that these findings indicate that the broad policy intentions of the changes are having positive results and making real changes to the lives of lone parents, where they have been able to transition into employment.

I acknowledge, however, that the review has also raised a number of matters of concern:

- Many of those who lost the One-parent Family Payment remain unemployed, or are in low paid or part-time employment,
- The balance of evidence indicates that there is an increased probability of being at risk of poverty as a result of the changes,
- Further supports, aimed at assisting lone parents to obtain full-time employment or increased hours of work, need to be put in place.

The impacts on lone parents arose from the combination of the policy changes to the scheme, and from the imposition, simultaneously, of the financial cuts imposed to welfare schemes across the board, arising out of the economic downturn. I, and my predecessors, have already taken action in recent Budgets to improve the position of lone parents, for example by progressively increasing the income disregard for those on Jobseekers Transition (JST) from a low

of €60 a week to €110 euro a week, and by targeting improved, tailored activation measures towards this group, to assist them into training and employment.

For example lone parents who wish to participate in education can continue to receive support from the Department either through the retention of their primary payment or Family Income Supplement or they can transfer to the Back to Education Allowance. Furthermore, to support lone parents participate in education, SUSI grants (both maintenance and fee grants) are payable concurrently with One-parent Family Payment and Jobseekers Transition. Therefore a lone parent can participate in education and receive the dual support of the One-parent Family Payment/ Jobseekers Transition and the SUSI maintenance grants.

Where the lone parent is on Jobseekers Allowance they can, should they wish to, participate in education, transfer to the Back to Education programme. The additional childcare supports coming on-stream are also of particular benefit to lone parents.

I consider that these measures are a step in the right direction, and I am working to ensure that there is no loss in the momentum to enhance the support for lone parents. The Review points to the need to intensify both the engagement with lone parents as they move off One-parent Family Payment, and the activation supports available, and I am requesting my officials to prioritise this.

The Department's employment services provide a case-managed approach to assist lone parents to avail of various opportunities within an ever-improving labour market. This case-managed approach will be developed further, specifically to offer more tailored and holistic progression plans for lone parents, that better reflect their individual circumstances.

The move to more tailored progressions plans for lone parents will incorporate supports to access the childcare, education and training and other appropriate supports that they require to, in turn, access the labour market. These changes should help to improve the living standards of, and reduce the risk of poverty faced by, lone parents.

I intend to continue to prioritise supports for lone parents, particularly those which incentivise work over welfare. I intend also to provide for the further review of the scheme. As there is a time lag before the benefits of labour market reforms appear I anticipate that this review will include data to the end of 2018.

Homemakers Scheme

654. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of backdating the homemaker's scheme to 1970 in incremental steps of five years from 1994; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42532/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension (contributory), all contributions, paid or credited, over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension contributory easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject

to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of his or her pension.

While the Deputy has requested the estimated cost of backdating the homemaker scheme to 1970 in incremental steps of five years from 1994, there are a number of factors that make it difficult to estimate that cost for specific year bands. In the first instance, it should be noted that there are twenty methods by which someone can qualify for a contributory pension depending upon their PRSI record, and so the impact of incremental changes to the Homemakers scheme is not possible to estimate without doing an analysis of the actual contribution records of potential claimant groups.

There are further data-related issues which make it even more challenging. For example, much of the data (e.g., child benefit records) used in the operation of the scheme at present for periods from 1994, is not readily available in computerised form for periods prior to 1984. Any projection, therefore, has to make assumptions regarding the composition of gaps in contribution records.

Costing multiple partial backdatings over a range of years would require very detailed analysis of the distribution of gaps in individual records during particular periods, an estimation of which gaps were driven by child rearing and which are a result of alternative reasons, and then re-calculation of those individual entitlements under the various qualification rules.

While no analysis of the particular proposal contained in the Deputy's question has been conducted, it is clear that any backdating would entail a significant and ongoing cost to the Social Insurance Fund. It is estimated that backdating it in respect of periods before its introduction in 1994 would cost some €290 million per year, and this figure would rise at a faster rate than the overall rise in the cost of State pensions. Limiting that backdating to 1970 would moderate that cost somewhat. However, it is unlikely to have a significant impact as the bulk of the cost would likely arise in the years immediately prior to 1994 and would decrease the further back the backdating was taken.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State pension non-contributory, which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

Work is under way to replace the yearly average system with a Total Contributions Approach. Under this approach, the rate of pension paid will more closely reflect the total number of contributions made by people, not when they paid them. The position of homemakers is being carefully considered in developing this new system of calculating the State Pension (contributory).

It is hoped that this approach to pension qualification will replace the current one from 2020. Following publication of the current actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund, a refined proposal will be developed. My Department will conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas. Following the consultation period, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval for the new approach, and then proceed to introduce legislation to give effect to this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

655. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of reversing changes made to the eligibility criteria for the State pension (contributory) in 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42533/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As a result of more people living to pension age and living longer in retirement the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision. This demographic change alone is expected to increase spending on pensions by over €220 million this year – not including the impact of rate increases. The current rate bands applying to the SPC were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. These rate bands more closely reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person than those in place between 2000 and 2012.

It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands from January 2018 would result in an annual cost of over €60 million in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 million each following year (e.g. it would be expected to cost some €70 million in 2019). This estimate reflects the numbers of those in receipt of reduced rate SPC payments, and does not include those who are claiming an alternative payment at a higher rate than their reduced SPC entitlement, and who might qualify for a higher rate of SPC if such a change were introduced. This estimate also assumes that any such change to rate bands would generally be implemented from a current date and as a result would not generate retrospective arrears.

The main beneficiaries from such a decision would be younger (post September 2012) pensioners who both:

- a. haven’t sufficient paid contributions into the Social Insurance Fund to qualify for a contributory pension at the maximum rate, or for the 98% rate applying to those with a yearly average of 40-47 weekly PRSI contributions paid or credited per year, and
- b. do not qualify for means-tested pension payments at the maximum rate because, in addition to their state pension, they also have means above a certain level (e.g. they are in receipt of an occupational pension and/or own a second residential property).

The savings created by the new rate bands were an alternative to cutting the core rate of pensions, at a time when Exchequer savings were required, and other social protection payments were being reduced across the board. Had a similar approach been taken with pensions, affecting everyone over State pension age – regardless of their means and their contribution record – the hardest hit would have been pensioners with no additional incomes, notably those paid a State pension (non-contributory), and widows and widowers living alone on only one pension payment. A very significantly higher proportion of such pensioners are women, and this approach would have been expected to result in more women over 65 experiencing consistent poverty, relative to men of the same age. The most recent CSO statistics show that this negative outcome has been avoided.

The alternative approach, taken by the Government at that time, made savings in respect of the State pension (contributory) by making rates of payment for new pensioners more reflective of contribution history, while maintaining the rates of payment for non-contributory and Widows/widowers pensions, as well as for contributory pensions paid to those who had contributed into the Social Insurance Fund throughout their working lives (i.e. with a yearly average of 40 or more). This approach safeguarded those most vulnerable pensioners, whilst avoiding undermining the contributory system, which is the basis for collection of PRSI, which funds the SPC

on a 'Pay-As-You-Go' basis.

Where people do not qualify for a maximum-rate contributory pension in their own right, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. Where their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them, and is subject to a personal means-test. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), based on their household means, amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate. There are very significant income and capital disregards in these means tests, which result in the large majority being paid at the maximum rate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

656. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of reintroducing the State transition pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42534/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years, which is the current State pension age. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028. In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to the new State pension age. Where this is not possible, and where a person is available for work, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension.

However, it is estimated that well over half of that cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have been two Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It is estimated that the net saving in 2018 is likely to be in the region of €84 million, and this is expected to rise to €87 million by 2020. These figures do not include future rate increases. Reversing this decision would, therefore, significantly increase the annual cost of State pensions, and would reduce the funds available to pay for any future increases in the rates of the payment.

The Deputy should note that there is no statutory retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may originally have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

In January 2016, an Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, chaired by the De-

partment of Public Expenditure and Reform, was established specifically to examine the implications arising from prevailing retirement ages. The final report of the Group made a number of recommendations to support working and retirement practices. This included a request to the Workplace Relations Commission to prepare a Code of Practice under Section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990 to help manage the engagement between employers and employees regarding retirement issues and longer working. The final report, the recommendations of which were accepted by Government in August 2016, is available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions Reform

657. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps which have been taken by her Department to date in establishing an auto enrolment pension system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42535/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Pensions reform is a priority for my term as Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and I can confirm the Government's intention to publish and commence the implementation of a pensions reform plan in the coming months. Perhaps the most fundamental reform measure which will be contained within this plan will relate to the development of a new auto enrolment supplementary retirement savings system for employees without pensions coverage. The rate of supplementary pension coverage in Ireland is 47% of the working population and this reduces to 35% when the private sector is considered in isolation. Whilst the State pension provides a reasonable basic level of income and guards against poverty in retirement, if measures are not taken to address this low rate of supplementary coverage, many future retirees will experience unwanted reductions in living standards when they reach retirement.

Auto enrolment will see a transition from the current and purely voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will, subject to certain parameters, automatically enrol employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement. It will increase the well-being, financial security and independence of future retirees.

Preliminary work has been undertaken by officials in my Department to begin to identify the most effective, deliverable and sustainable automatic enrolment model. Previously, an Interdepartmental 'Universal Retirement Savings Group' (URSG) considered the issue and concluded that building reform consensus across political, business and civil society is essential for any new system. To this end, the URSG held initial consultations with citizens, employer representatives, trade unions, the pensions industry, advocacy and interest groups, as well as Irish and international experts.

A review of international automatic enrolment retirement systems by my officials has confirmed that success is dependent on well tested design principles and securing member trust. To this end, further detailed evidence building and consultation will be undertaken to inform fundamental choices which are required regarding the preferred operational structure and organisational governance for a new system as well as many design elements such as contribution levels, financial incentives and target membership. Correctly positioning/designing each of these will be critical to the success of any system.

Subject to any Government decision regarding the manner in which this project should be progressed, it is my objective that first members would be enrolled in the new system in 2021. This project timeframe reflects the scale of such a programme and its importance as being the most fundamental reform of the Irish supplementary pension system in generations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Reviews

658. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number and subject matter of reports and reviews that have been commissioned by her Department and are currently under way, in tabular form; if an outside body has been commissioned to conduct the report and or review; the expected publication dates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42536/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled by my officials and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

659. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of households in receipt of rent supplement by county, in tabular form; the number of households in each county that have had their rent supplement increased above the prescribed limits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42537/17]

678. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the annualised cost of the average monthly rent currently paid to rent supplement recipients under the scheme; the number of families availing of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42839/17]

691. **Deputy Kevin O’Keefe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a mechanism whereby persons who are awaiting the outcome of their HAP application with their local authority can be permitted to apply for and be paid rent allowance or SWA in the interim will be approved in view of the length of time it is taking for these applications to be processed. [42996/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 659, 678 and 691 together.

The rent supplement scheme, administered by my Department, plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting in excess of 37,460 recipients for which the Government has provided €253 million for in 2017. A county breakdown of rent supplements recipients as at end September 2017 is provided in the attached tabular statement.

The full annualised costs for the existing customer base at current blended rent supplement tenancy rates of €480 per month, is approximately €220 million.

In recognition of the on-going rental market difficulties, my Department continues to implement a targeted case-by-case policy approach in the administration of rent supplement that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits. In addition, the Protocol arrangement in place with Threshold continues to operate in the areas where supply issues

are particularly acute covering Dublin, Cork, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow and Galway City. To date in 2017, in excess of 1,450 recipients have been supported with increased rent payments. A county breakdown of these payments is provided in the attached tabular statement.

As the Deputies will be aware the strategic policy direction of the Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support, with the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, available nationwide from 1 March 2017. There are currently c. 27,600 HAP tenancies in place of which c. 8,200 (c. 30%) are transfers from rent supplement. In addition to the ongoing transfer of long-term rent supplement recipients to HAP, the majority of new applicants seeking State support towards their rent are supported by Local Authorities through HAP rather than rent supplement.

Rent supplement is not an interim or ancillary payment while a HAP application is being processed. However, rent supplement will continue to be paid to households who are already in the private rented sector but who, generally because of a loss of income through unemployment, require a short term income support to pay their rent.

Officials in my Department continue to work closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and local authorities to facilitate the ongoing implementation of the HAP scheme including the transfer of cases from Rent Supplement. Queries in relation to the administration of the HAP scheme should be raised with my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government or the Local Authority in question.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputies.

Tabular Statement: Rent Supplement by County at end of September 2017

County	Recipients
CARLOW	428
CAVAN	312
CLARE	228
CORK	3,810
DONEGAL	170
DUBLIN	17,593
GALWAY	1,862
KERRY	1,203
KILDARE	1,999
KILKENNY	219
LAOIS	653
LEITRIM	196
LIMERICK	790
LONGFORD	293
LOUTH	540
MAYO	701
MEATH	628
MONAGHAN	152
OFFALY	319
ROSCOMMON	423
SLIGO	152
TIPPERARY	487
WATERFORD	244
WESTMEATH	919

County	Recipients
WEXFORD	1,508
WICKLOW	1,633
Total	37,462

Tabular Statement: Increased Rental Payments by County: January – September 2017

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
CARLOW	19		19
CAVAN	17		17
CLARE	0		0
CORK	6	2	8
DONEGAL	0		0
DUBLIN	589	237	826
GALWAY	11	5	16
KERRY	87		87
KILDARE	115	4	119
KILKENNY	5		5
LAOIS	0		0
LEITRIM	11		11
LIMERICK	10		10
LONGFORD	17		17
LOUTH	32		32
MAYO	8		8
MEATH	44	2	46
MONAGHAN	0		0
OFFALY	9		9
ROSCOMMON	29		29
SLIGO	0		0
TIPPERARY	36		36
WATERFORD	5		5
WESTMEATH	35		35
WEXFORD	2		2
WICKLOW	116	0	116
Overall Total	1,203	250	1,453

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

660. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to revise the level of income disregard for the purposes of means testing for those persons in receipt of Army pensions which are currently €2 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42585/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that for the purpose of means testing for weekly social assistance schemes, account is taken of property other than the family home owned by the claimant and his or her spouse/partner, other capital such as savings, investments and shares, and any income of the claimant or spouse. The means test for weekly social assistance schemes provides for a disregard of €104 per annum for army pensions payments paid under the Army Pensions

Acts 1923 to 1980. It should be noted that the State Pension Non Contributory scheme has a general means disregard of €30 per week. This means that a person can receive an army pension of up to €1,664 per annum (if she or he had no other means) and still receive the maximum weekly rate of the State Pension Non Contributory. A pensioner with income of €250 per week can still receive a minimal pension payment, which includes supplementary benefits such as the Free Travel pass, the Household Benefits package and Fuel Allowance.

The means testing of social welfare payments reflects the fact that there is an expectation that people with income are in a position to use that income to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and Budgetary context.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

661. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the most appropriate payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42588/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of a jobseekers payment, the eligibility criteria for which state that the person must be available for and genuinely seeking full time employment. Additionally, they are required, when requested to do so, to engage with the department's activation measures, avail of suitable education, training or development opportunities or specified employment programmes and schemes. From the information available to the Department it has been confirmed that the person concerned has not been referred to Tús, however she was randomly selected to engage with the JobPath initiative on the 02 October, 2017. JobPath is an approach to employment activation which caters mainly for people who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) to assist them to secure and sustain full-time paid employment or self-employment. Participants on JobPath will receive intensive individual support to help them address barriers to employment and to assist them in finding jobs.

If the person concerned is not in a position to engage with Jobpath or meet the other eligibility criteria of the jobseeker payment they should contact their nearest Intreo Office or Social Welfare Branch Office to discuss other scheme options available from the Department that may be more suitable to them, given their current circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

662. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the proof of address which will be accepted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42600/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned on 6/10/17 provided a credit union statement and a letter from the household-er as evidence of his current address, and advised that he has no other documentary evidence to support his residency. The matter is currently under review and the person concerned will be advised of the outcome in due course. I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 663 withdrawn.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Eligibility

664. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the allowance for savings as means for non-contributory pension applicants. [42629/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In assessing means for social assistance payments, account is taken of the income and the value of capital and property of the claimant. Social welfare legislation provides that the yearly value of property (including capital) owned but not personally used or enjoyed is assessable for social assistance payments. Such property includes all monies held in financial institutions or otherwise, the market value of shares and houses and premises owned by a claimant which may or may not be put to commercial use. However, it does not include property such as the family home or, for example, a premises used by the claimant in carrying out a business.

For assessment purposes, savings are assessed in the following way:

Capital – Assessment Formula

AMOUNT OF CAPITAL	WEEKLY MEANS ASSESSED
Up to €20,000	Nil
€20,000 - €30,000	€1 per each €1,000
€30,000 - €40,000	€2 per each €1,000
Over €40,000	€4 per each €1,000

It should be noted that, for the purposes of the State Pension Non-Contributory (SPNC), the amounts above are doubled in the case of a couple. In addition, the SPNC has a general means disregard of €30 per week.

This means that a single claimant of SPNC with no other income can have savings of €40,000 (which would result in a weekly means assessment from capital of €30) and this would have no impact on their SPNC payment. Similarly, a SPNC claimant who is one of a couple can have savings of €80,000 (and no other means) and the claimant would still receive the maximum weekly rate of SPNC. Note that each member of the couple is assessed with half of the total property and income of the couple.

Furthermore, no account is taken of interest or dividend payments received in the means assessment. The assessment formula reflects the fact that there is an expectation that persons with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means-tested welfare payment. If the threshold were to be increased, the people who would benefit would be those who had higher levels of income or assets.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and Budgetary context.

Labour Activation Programmes

665. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to give control back to the local scheme co-ordinators in the sourcing and placing

of individual scheme workers on Tús and community employment schemes in view of the fact the local knowledge of the co-ordinators is not being utilised in the current structures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42644/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. These supports include employment schemes such as Community Employment (CE) and Tús. These schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping stone back to employment. The objective of these schemes is to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities in returning to the labour market.

Tús provides short-term, work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. This initiative is being delivered through the network of local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta, known as Implementing Bodies (IBs).

Participants are selected by a random process conducted by my Department. The selected jobseekers are informed when they have been selected and, if they agree to participate, have their contact details passed to the relevant IB. To further support the recruitment process, those fulfilling the scheme criteria can apply to my Department's case officers to be nominated for the initiative.

The IB's are responsible for matching the person's skills to suit work placements available. They also provide a range of other on-the-job and mentoring supports. All of the work undertaken by Tús participants must be beneficial to the local community and be eligible for financial support. Participants are taken from a panel of eligible candidates which is maintained by the IB. When a position becomes available, the participant's suitability is established by the IB and the community/voluntary organisation.

In the case of the CE scheme, the CE Sponsors advertise their vacancies free-of-charge on the Department's JobsIreland website, www.jobsireland.ie. CE schemes can also actively advertise vacancies in their local communities. At a local level, various methods of promoting CE have been arranged between my Department and local CE schemes, including targeting potentially eligible jobseekers to attend a Job-fare, where details of CE vacancies and employment opportunities are provided. Interested individuals are required to meet with a case officer at their local Intreo Office to determine eligibility. My Department then provides a list of referrals to the CE scheme sponsor for interview. I have no plans to change this process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

666. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the Tús and community employment schemes regarding scheme participants who are over 60 years of age and considered by the local scheme coordinator to be unlikely to transition back into full-time employment in order that their participation in community work can be extended beyond the current time restrictions with no cost to the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42645/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. These sup-

ports include employment schemes such as Community Employment (CE) and Tús. These schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping stone back to employment. The objective of these schemes is to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities in returning to the labour market.

All participants and community groups are aware of the time limits for participation on these schemes. The participation limits aim to ensure the benefit of participation on a work scheme is available to the widest possible number of jobseekers. In addition, it is generally recognised that there is a greater likelihood of a 'lock-in' effect where a scheme is of a longer duration.

With the ongoing welcome reductions in the live register, issues such as the number of places, the criteria for participation on Tús, including age limits, will all be considered in the coming months. A review of the current rule for CE, which enables a percentage of those aged 62 or over to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age, is currently under-way and is expected to be finalised in the coming weeks.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

667. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42668/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on the 22 August 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

668. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount of funding allocated in 2016 to a programme (details supplied); the amount of funding utilised in 2016; her plans for unused funds in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42705/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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 by an additional €5.5 million which is benefitting 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.

In addition to providing some increases to existing DEIS schools benefitting almost 6,000 children, Budget 2017 funding also provides for the inclusion in the scheme, from September 2017, of up to 240 new schools supporting 47,000 children. This includes 65 newly designated DEIS schools and 174 non-DEIS schools selected in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills. This is the first time in many years that schools outside of DEIS have been invited to join the scheme.

Prior to the introduction of DEIS in 2005, all schools that were part of one of a number of Department of Education and Skills' initiatives for disadvantaged schools were eligible to participate in the programme, which included Breaking the Cycle, Giving Children an Even Break, the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme. These schools have continued to remain in the scheme. In the previous academic year, 2016 / 2017, there were 118 Breakfast Clubs and 46 Snack Clubs provided in 153 non-DEIS schools at a cost of some €968,000.

Applications for the scheme for the 2017 / 2018 school year continue to be received and processed. It is expected that the full funding available under the scheme will be allocated over the coming weeks.

Rent Supplement Scheme

669. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an investigation will be carried out into a case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42721/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the legislative provisions governing the award of rent supplement, the Department's relationship is with the tenant; the tenant makes the application for rent supplement and payment is made to the tenant. Rent supplement is specifically for the benefit of tenants to assist them with their accommodation needs. There is no direct relationship between the landlord and the Department in the administration of the scheme. Separate to these arrangements is the contract between the tenant and landlord under a tenancy agreement. This is personal to them and is subject to the legislative framework provided under the Residential Tenancies Acts. In the event of non-compliance with a tenancy contract, a complaint may be made to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) by either the landlord or the tenant. The RTB may make a Determination Order arising from any such complaint, with enforcement proceedings available through the Courts. This Department has no role in this debt recovery process.

The case in question has been examined on several occasions in response to enquiries from the landlord. He has been made aware of the Department's position in relation to this case. A further full examination of the case will be undertaken and a response will be provided directly to the Deputy.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Schemes

670. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the waiting time is set in legislation or a statutory instrument to qualify for community employment scheme, Tús or back to education allowance (details supplied); and if so, the legislation or statutory instrument that references same. [42749/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the schemes referred to by the Deputy are not statutory schemes, their terms and conditions are not set out in legislation. These administrative schemes are governed by the operating guidelines which are updated by my Department from time to time. Guidelines covering the rules of each scheme are available at www.welfare.ie.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

671. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a provision has been made in the application process for the public services card for a parent or guardian to sign on behalf of a person with severe disabilities who cannot physically sign or mark the form themselves; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42751/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Public Services Card (PSC) has been introduced to enable individuals to gain access to public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible. The PSC is designed to replace other cards within the public sector such as the free travel pass and the social services card of this Department and to make it easier for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers. A PSC is currently issued following a registration process which involves the verification of identity data already held by the Department and the capture of an individual's photograph and signature. The signature is captured electronically via a signature pad.

Where a person with a disability attends for a SAFE registration, and it is not possible to capture a signature for that person, the officer processing the registration makes a diagonal line on the signature pad. This line, and not a signature, appears on the PSC.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Ministerial Responsibilities

672. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the powers she has delegated to the Ministers of State in her Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42779/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government's authority to delegate powers and duties to Ministers of State is contained in section 2 of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1977.

On 14 June 2017 Deputy Finian McGrath was reappointed Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Health with special responsibility for disability issues. The delegation of Minister of State McGrath's statutory functions in relation to my Department was effected by way of the Social Protection (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 (S.I. 321 of 2017) which was signed by an Taoiseach on 18 July 2017.

On 20th June 2017 Deputy Pat Breen was appointed Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Employment and Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of the Taoiseach, and the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for trade, employment, business, EU digital single market and data protection. The preparation of a delegation order for Minister of State Breen is currently being considered.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

673. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a review of the participation of older persons on community employment schemes will be completed; and if the review will be published. [42804/17]

674. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce changes to the criteria related to the community employment scheme, particularly related to the two year limit on a person's assignment to the scheme. [42805/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 673 and 674 together.

Following the publication of my Department's Report - An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme – earlier in the year, the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions around participation on CE. The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register, to standardise eligibility and other conditions regarding the length of time a person can participate on the programme and to promote progression outcomes.

The changes, which are effective since 3 July 2017, has seen the general qualifying age for CE, for those on the live register, reduced from 25 to 21 years. It will also now be easier for previous participants who have exhausted their CE entitlement to requalify, as participation prior to the year 2007 will be disregarded. While participants between 21 and 55 years can avail of one year on the programme, this can be extended on approval by the Department by up to two more years, if they are working towards a major award/industry recognised equivalent to support their progression to employment. CE participants aged 55 and over can now avail of up to three consecutive years on a scheme. An overall lifetime limit of six years will apply to CE participants (seven years if on a disability payment). A person may re-qualify for CE after 12 months of being in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment, provided they have not reached their six year limit.

Further changes, which will be progressed over the coming months, include the roll-out of the 'two strand approach' of activation and social inclusion in terms of how CE places are categorised.

In addition, a review of the participation of older people on schemes is being undertaken and I expect that this will be completed in the coming weeks. The question of publication will be considered once the review is completed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

675. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the public services card in the context of persons that have undergone or are undergoing gender transitioning; the way in which the card complies with the Gender Recognition Act 2015, in order that all of a person's historical personal details are protected from being accessed by officials processing a transaction using the card, from officials in the process of issuing a card and other authorised bodies that can demand the card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42811/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

Public Services Card (PSC) has been introduced to enable individuals to gain access to public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible. A PSC is currently issued following a registration process which involves the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data already held by the Department. This registration process is known as SAFE.

The PSC is designed to replace other cards within the public sector such as the free travel pass and the social services card of my Department and to make it easier for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers.

The following information is inscribed on the card: Forename, Surname, PPS Number, Photograph, Signature, Card issue number, and Expiry date. The following information is encoded on the chip: Forename, Surname, PPS Number, Date of birth, Sex, Mother's birth surname, Place of birth, Birth surname, Nationality, Photograph, Signature, Card issue number, and Expiry date.

Applications for Gender Recognition Certificates are processed in a single area of the Department. Only a small number of specifically trained officers process these applications. Only these officers can access an individual's historical data after a Gender Recognition Certificate has been issued. System checks are in place to ensure that no other officers in the Department can access this data.

The PSC contains the data held by the Department for an individual at the specific point in time at which the SAFE registration takes place. Where a person has obtained a Gender Recognition Certificate, the data on the Department's systems visible to all officers, other than the very few mentioned previously, as well as the data on any PSC issued reflects the new status of that person and does not refer in any way to their previous status or the fact that they have been issued with a Gender Recognition Certificate.

As part of the process of issuing a Gender Recognition Certificate a person is advised that they may require a new PSC and is asked to contact the officer dealing with their application so that a new SAFE registration appointment may be made for them with a SAFE supervisor. This ensures that the registration is handled with the required sensitivity.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

676. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if hours of work carried out under partial capacity benefit underlying the payment of invalidity pension can be used in conjunction with a spouse's hours of work to jointly meet the hours required for family income supplement entitlement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42816/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which allows you to return to work or self-employment (if you have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from the Department of Social Protection.

If you have been getting Illness Benefit (IB) for a minimum of 6 months or Invalidity Pension (INVP) and wish to return to work, you may qualify for PCB if your capacity for work is reduced by your medical condition.

You may not work until you have received written approval to do so from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. You should also get the approval of your doctor before taking up employment.

There is no restriction on earnings or number of hours you can work. You can work in a self-employed capacity while getting PCB. You cannot get PCB and Family Income Supplement (FIS) together.

Therefore, a couple applying for FIS in a joint capacity where the hours of work are combined and where one of the claimants is in receipt of PCB would not qualify for FIS.

However, FIS Section would advise if the couple were financially better off to claim FIS exclusively without PCB or if the claimant not in receipt of PCB were to increase their hours in order to qualify. In that case, PCB would be regarded as assessable income for FIS purposes and the usual assessment would apply.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Disability Allowance Payments

677. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason disability allowance for a person (details supplied) was not backdated to the actual date of application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42820/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this man on 3 July 2017. The claim was awarded with effect from 5 July 2017, the first pay date following receipt of the application.

My Department has no record of a previous application for disability allowance from this man. If he, or an agent on his behalf, wishes to make an application for backdating prior to 5 July 2017, he or she may do so, in writing, clearly stating the grounds for the claim. The matter will then be considered by a deciding officer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 678 answered with Question No. 659.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

679. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will re-examine the situation whereby a female employee paying PRSI contributions remained out of work to rear children and now finds herself in a position that she will receive a reduced rate of State pension (contributory) in view of the fact that no PRSI contributions were paid while she worked at home. [42842/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are a number of pension schemes operated by my Department, and the most advantageous of these to a person will depend upon a number of factors, including their PRSI contribution record, their means, and some other factors regarding their personal circumstances.

The State pension (contributory) is one such payment, and is based on contributions made

into the Social Insurance Fund, which finance that pension scheme on a pay-as-you-go basis. People who have made significant contributions into the Fund are more likely to receive their pension under that scheme than under other pensions.

To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension (contributory), all contributions, paid or credited, over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension (contributory) also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of pensioners who qualify for that scheme, which is used to set the rate of his or her pension.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State pension (non-contributory), which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate. The large majority of both of these payments are made at the maximum rate.

Work is under way to replace the yearly average system with a Total Contributions Approach which it is hoped will replace the current one from 2020. Under this approach, the rate of pension paid will more closely reflect the total number of contributions made by people, not when they paid them. The position of homemakers is being carefully considered in developing this new system. Following publication of the current actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund, a refined proposal will be developed. My Department will conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders on possible approaches. Following that process, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval for the selected approach, and then proceed to introduce legislation to give effect to this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

680. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in respect of public services cards for those claiming a social welfare payment; the number of persons that have been refused payment as a result of not having a card; the payments concerned and the legal basis for such refusal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42850/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In 2005, the Government approved a rules-based standard for establishing and authenticating an individual's identity for the purposes of access to public services. This standard is known as the Standard Authentication Framework Environment, SAFE. A person who successfully completes a SAFE 2 registration process (i.e. verifies their identity to a substantial level of assurance) is issued with a Public Services Card (PSC). In the case of my Department's own services, the legislation governing identity verification for existing claimants is set out in the

Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended, *viz.*

- Section 247C(1) of the Act provides that the Minister may require any person receiving a benefit to satisfy the Minister as to his or her identity ;

- Section 247C(2) of the Act specifies the consequences of failure to satisfy the Minister in relation to identity as required, specifically that a person shall be disqualified from receiving a benefit; and

- Section 247C(3) of the Act specifies the manner in which the Minister may be so satisfied; in effect, this Section describes the process for registering a person's identity - this is the SAFE 2 Process.

This legislation requires a person to satisfy the Minister as to their identity and allows disqualification from receipt of a benefit in the event that it is not done. It is not possible for a person to satisfy the Minister as to his or her identity without being SAFE2 registered.

My Department does not collect data on the number of individuals who currently, or who, at any point in time, have had a payment stopped by reason of failing to complete the SAFE2 registration process. The Deputy will appreciate that this data is fluid in nature e.g. a considerable number of customers who have a payment or entitlement suspended subsequently decide to complete the SAFE2 process and have their payment or entitlement reinstated and backdated to the date of suspension. It should be noted that of the remainder, a considerable portion do not make any contact with the Department at all.

The decision to stop a payment is never made lightly. However, where a customer does not satisfy the Minister in relation to identity, in accordance with the legislative requirements, a payment can be disqualified. In advance of any such disqualification, the Department makes every effort to engage with the customer to explain the legislative basis for the SAFE2 registration process and the consequences of potential disqualification. Where a payment has been disqualified and the customer subsequently successfully completes the SAFE2 registration process, their payment will be reinstated by my Department (assuming they continue to meet all qualifying criteria for that payment) from the date of compliance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit

681. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the creditable period beyond 16 weeks for those on unpaid maternity leave; the reason this limit exists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42852/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): PRSI credited contributions ("credits") are an integral part of the social insurance system. For the most part they are linked to having an underlying entitlement to a social welfare payment while temporarily detached from the labour force or having entitlement to certain statutory periods of leave. The primary purpose of PRSI credits is to secure social welfare benefits and pensions of employees by covering gaps in insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI such as during periods of unemployment or illness, for example.

In the case those on maternity leave, credits may be awarded for 26 weeks during which an individual is on maternity leave and, subject to satisfying the PRSI contribution conditions, is entitled to receive maternity benefit. Credits may also be awarded in respect of the additional

16 weeks unpaid maternity leave which may be taken immediately after the end of the 26 weeks of paid maternity benefit.

Any additional leave beyond the 16 weeks unpaid leave is at the discretion of the employer and is not covered by statutory leave arrangements for which credits can be awarded. The social welfare code does take account of period spent caring for children on a full-time basis through the homemaker scheme. The homemaker's scheme is designed to help homemakers and carers qualify for state pension (contributory). Years spent caring on a full-time basis are disregarded when calculating the state pension (contributory) rate of payment.

Youth Guarantee

682. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will report on her Department's response to the report from the European Court of Auditors which described the youth guarantee scheme as falling short of expectations; her views on the fact that youth unemployment rates remained over double the national average in March 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42853/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The report by the Court of Auditors relates to the overall implementation at the European Union level of the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee, rather than making findings about individual Member States. The Court did however visit seven Member States, including Ireland, to assemble material for its assessment.

The report concludes that the "Member States visited had made progress in implementing the Youth Guarantee and some results had been achieved" but that "the current situation - more than three years after the adoption of the Council Recommendation falls short of the initial expectations raised at the launch of the Youth Guarantee".

The European Commission, to which the Court's report is directed in the first instance, has explicitly rejected this opinion of the Court. In its "Reply of the Commission", published with the Court's report, the Commission

For its part, Ireland made clear, in the implementation plan published in response to the Recommendation, that "the deeply ingrained problem of youth unemployment cannot be solved with the flick of a switch" and that achieving substantial reductions in youth unemployment represented a medium-term goal of economic and labour market policy.

At the time of the adoption of the implementation plan in December 2013, the seasonally adjusted rate of youth unemployment in Ireland was 25.6%, somewhat above the then EU average of 23.4%. Since then youth unemployment here has been reduced to 14.8% in September 2017, significantly below the current EU figure of 18.9%.

Both in absolute terms, and relative to the situation elsewhere in the EU, the improvement in the youth labour market has exceeded expectations in the period since 2013. The most recent trends suggest that further significant reductions in youth unemployment can be expected in the period ahead.

National Internship Scheme

683. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the promised internship scheme to replace JobBridge; the expected

commencement date of this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42854/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobBridge was introduced in July 2011 in response to the sharp and dramatic increase in unemployment. A robust external evaluation of the scheme conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants in 2016 found that it is one of the most effective labour market programmes – increasing participants’ employment outcomes by 32%. It also found that while participants rated the scheme positively on 18 out of 20 aspects measured, most were dissatisfied with the level of payment and a sizable minority rated the scheme negatively on some aspects, for example the quality of training offered. Based on these findings, and taking account of the improvement in labour market conditions, Indecon recommended that JobBridge be discontinued and replaced with a new scheme. A copy of the full evaluation can be found at: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/JobBridge-Evaluation.aspx>.

The Labour Market Council welcomed the report and noted the positive employment impact of the scheme. A majority of the Council similarly recommended that JobBridge be replaced.

Having considered the evidence and the suggestions put forward by Indecon and the Labour Market Council, my predecessor as Minister for Social Protection announced his intention to replace JobBridge with a new work experience programme that would address criticisms of the scheme and would be better suited to the much-improved labour market.

JobBridge was closed to new applications from 27 October 2016 to allow for a period of consultation with key stakeholders on design principles for any proposed new work experience programme and to facilitate an orderly wind down of the current scheme.

The consultation process is completed and I have considered options on how best to proceed having regard to the overall policy and Budgetary context.

As Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, my focus is to ensure that resources are targeted at good outcomes from an employment perspective and have regard to the very considerable improvement in the labour market in recent years.

In that respect, I want to target resources at people who face particular challenges getting into or re-entering work, such as young people without any experience and older people who have been unemployed for a long time.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Appeals

684. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if back payments due to a person (details supplied) will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42862/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A request for a review of State pension non-contributory was received from the person concerned on 27 February 2017. A Deciding Officer reviewed the case and awarded an increase in the person’s pension to the maximum weekly rate payable, with effect from 11 August 2017.

I have asked my officials to review the decision in this case as a matter of urgency and to contact the person concerned directly to discuss this matter further.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

685. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to allow persons with mental health problems who wish to stay indefinitely on community employment schemes with the support of their health care providers do so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42874/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme whose aim is to enhance the employability and mobility of disadvantaged and unemployed persons by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. It helps participants to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. All CE participants are subject to a participation limit. This limit is based on CE participation since 2007 and is 6 years in total. Persons qualifying for CE via a disability-related payment can qualify for 1 further year - in other words 7 years in total since 2007. These limits are necessary to ensure places are available to other eligible social welfare recipients. The Deputy will appreciate that if a person was eligible for one year on CE but was retained for three, this would deny two more eligible persons the opportunity of a year's placement on CE.

Overall, the aim of CE is to progress unemployed and other disadvantaged persons into full-time sustainable employment and/or further education and training.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Respite Care Grant Eligibility

686. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will reform the respite care grant to include those who are obliged by economic necessity to work outside the home in excess of 15 hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42877/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is a condition for receipt of carer's benefit and carer's allowance and the carer's support grant, that the carer must be providing full-time care and attention to a person who requires it because of a specified illness or disability. This condition is moderated by legislation allowing the carer to work or engage in training outside the home for an aggregate total of 15 hours per week. During this period of employment or education or training, adequate provision must be made for the care of the relevant person. These provisions achieve a reasonable balance between meeting the primary legislative requirement for providing full-time care for the care recipient and addressing the needs of the carers to engage in employment or education, thereby reducing any risk of social isolation experienced by carers.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

687. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the terms and conditions regarding eligibility for community employment; if a person can be removed from the scheme while on maternity leave as a result of their spouse commencing employment during their leave (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42948/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Community Employment, (CE) schemes are designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people with an opportunity to engage in part-time work and training within their communities on a temporary, fixed-term basis. CE scheme participants are obliged to notify their employer immediately of any change in their family circumstances. This change could relate directly to the scheme participant or it could be that the circumstances of their adult dependant has changed (e.g. he or she finds or loses employment; receives or stops receiving a social welfare payment in their own right or is absent from the State etc.).

Most changes are straightforward and simply require the addition or cessation of the relevant dependant allowance. However, where the family income changes, the new rate of payment must be calculated to reflect what the person would be entitled to under their original social welfare payment arrangements. In order to remain eligible to participate in CE, the person must continue to fulfil the qualifying conditions of their underlying social welfare payment.

If the Deputy provides my office with the details of the particular case, I will have the matter examined.

I trust that clarifies the matters for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

688. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application by a person (details supplied) for domiciliary care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42952/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions have been taken, including assigning additional deciding officers to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application. Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA was received in respect of this child on 19 September 2017. While it is not possible to provide an exact date on when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in May

2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme Administration

689. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if in cases in which rural developments have not taken up their full allocation of places they can be transferred to companies that are looking for additional persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42961/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support to farmers and fishermen and women who have an entitlement to specified social welfare payments. As the Deputy is

aware, in recognition of the crucial work undertaken in rural communities under the RSS and as part of the social welfare budget package for 2017, an additional 500 places were made available with effect from 1 February 2017 increasing the overall number of places on RSS from 2,600 to 3,100. The additional places were allocated taking into account a number of factors including the number of places already allocated, the demand for new places in particular areas, work opportunities available in local areas and the numbers of farmers and fishermen/women in receipt of income support.

While the overall responsibility for the operation of the RSS rests with the Department, it is implemented at a local level by 35 Local Development Companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta in the Gaeltacht areas (known as the Implementing Bodies (IB)). Accordingly, the relevant IB has responsibility for the day-to-day operation of each scheme including the recruitment of eligible participants.

At this point, all of the IBs have plans in place to fully utilise the places available to them and, therefore, there are no plans at present for the re-distribution of unfilled places. However, my Department will keep the position under review.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Leave

690. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of the recent Government announcement to extend maternity leave to mothers that have a premature baby; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42984/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Maternity Benefit is a payment made for 26 weeks to employed and self-employed pregnant women who satisfy certain pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions in order to avoid the need for them to work pre and post-delivery of their baby. The rate of payment was increased to €235 per week from March 2017. In 2017 it is estimated that my Department will spend approximately €266 million on maternity benefit, in respect of an average of 22,000 recipients per week.

New arrangements, which take effect for premature babies born on or after Sunday, 1 October, will increase the duration of maternity leave and the associated maternity benefit to be paid in cases where a baby is born prematurely.

Under the new arrangements, a mother who qualifies for maternity benefit will be entitled to an additional period of paid maternity leave, in addition to her current entitlement of 26 weeks, where her baby is born prematurely. The additional period to be added will be the number of weeks from the baby's actual date of birth up to two weeks before the expected date of confinement, at which point the current entitlement to 26 weeks leave and benefit would normally begin. The additional period will commence at the end of the standard 26 week period of paid maternity leave.

Question No. 691 answered with Question No. 659.

Disability Allowance Applications

692. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); when

it is expected the application will be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42224/17]

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. The application was referred by a deciding officer (DO) to a social welfare investigative officer (SWI) for a report on this lady's means and circumstances. The SWI met with her on 8 September 2017 and a further meeting is scheduled for 6 October 2017. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to the DO, a decision will be made on the application and she will be notified directly of the outcome. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Applications

693. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can make a late application for a fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42225/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman in question is in receipt of Invalidity Pension and is in receipt of fuel allowance under the national fuel scheme from the 14 October 2010. His preferred payment option has been changed from weekly to two instalment payments as requested by him with the first instalment issuing to his nominated bank account on the 05 October 2017. The gentleman concerned was notified on the 29 September 2017 of the change in his fuel allowance payments.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Data

694. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting times for farm assist payments; the number of applications pending by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42235/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): At the end of August there were 7,346 recipients of a farm assist payment.

Data on applications pending and the average time to award for Farm Assist is only available in my Department's information systems aggregated together with the corresponding data for Jobseeker's Allowance claims, so that it is not possible to provide the requested disaggregated information for Farm Assist.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

695. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding a domiciliary care allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42253/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing

of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions have been taken, including assigning additional deciding officers to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA was received in respect of this child on the 30th May 2017. While it is not possible to provide an exact date on when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received during May 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Reports

696. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has received a report (details supplied) on the impact of austerity measures on lone parent families; her views on the report; if she will publish the report in advance of budget 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42273/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Act 2016, enacted on 19 December 2016, included a commitment that a review of the changes to the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) scheme since January 2012 would be laid before the Houses of Oireachtas within 9 months of the enactment of the Act.

The report was to assess the financial and social effects of the OFP changes taking into account the effects on welfare dependency and the poverty rates of those affected. The scope of the review included the long term age related policy changes to the scheme that were implemented since January 2012 in addition to the shorter term changes required to achieve savings across all social welfare expenditure over the same period on foot of the economic downturn.

On foot of this legislative commitment, a formal tendering process was initiated by my Department and, on the conclusion of that process, Indecon International Economic Consultants (Indecon) were selected to undertake the work involved. They commenced work on the report in April of this year.

In order to complete the review, Indecon carried out a detailed quantitative and econometric analysis of a number of relevant datasets to assess the impact of the changes on lone parents. The review also included one of the largest surveys targeting one-parent families in Ireland with 33,000 lone parents surveyed. Responses were received and analysed from almost 3,700 lone parents who were directly affected by the changes. This provided an excellent opportunity to gather the views and experiences of lone parents affected by the changes.

The timeframe for the review was very ambitious given the scale and complexity of the issues to be covered in the review. However, I have the report and it has been considered by my Department and I expect to lay it before the Houses and to publish it in the coming days.

Lobbying Data

697. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of occasions on which she has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health

(Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons with whom she has met; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; her views on the issues raised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42290/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection has had no meetings with lobbying groups or bodies in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill.

Commencement of Legislation

698. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all sections of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 are now in force; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42309/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 provides for a wide range of matters relating to the registration of life events in the State.

Certain provisions, such as those relating to marriages of convenience, were commenced in August of 2015. However, it has not been possible to commence all sections of the Act due to ongoing industrial relations issues with staff of the Civil Registration Service who are employees of the HSE.

At this point, I am not in a position to provide a date for commencement of the remaining sections but I would like to reassure the Deputy that officials from my Department, the Department of Health and the HSE are working to bring about a resolution to this matter at the earliest possible date.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service Reports

699. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has considered the submission by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, MABS, regarding the proposals to replace local voluntary MABS companies with regional companies; the rationale for this proposal; if she will reconsider this proposal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42334/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In February 2017, the Board of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) decided to restructure its governance arrangements to a regional model comprising sixteen companies, 8 CIS and 8 MABS companies. The aim of the change is to improve the effectiveness of the control environment, financial management and governance of CIS and MABS service networks and service delivery standards and consistency. This operational decision follows five years of analysis and consideration of options and extensive consultation with all stakeholders.

Since the Board's decision, CIB has held regional consultation with representatives of the CIS and MABS networks. In May, 300 representatives of staff, management, and volunteers, as well as Chairpersons and representatives of local CIS and MABS services attended these facilitated sessions. During the summer months, 238 people attended 8 Focus Groups hosted by CIB, at which service delivery strategy, board structures and linkages, and staff roles under the new sixteen company model were discussed. On 2nd October, a further focus group was held by CIB, specifically for volunteers, which was attended by 35 volunteers from across CIS

services.

As a statutory body, the Board has the sole right to make decisions on its day to day operations as it sees fit. Any suggestions regarding proposals for alternative governance models are therefore a matter for the Board of CIB.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

700. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of rural schools availing of the school meals programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42342/17]

701. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all rural DEIS schools avail of the school meals programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42344/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 700 and 701 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 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 scheme is available to all DEIS schools and support can be provided towards breakfast for all children and lunch for the majority of children. Of the total 900 DEIS schools, some 850 (95%) are participating in the scheme.

The Department of Education and Skills does not have a designation of rural or urban for all DEIS schools, other than for primary schools. Some 320 of the total 360 rural DEIS primary schools (89%) are participating in the scheme.

Schools must reapply for funding under the scheme in respect of each school year and my Department is continuing to receive applications, which may further increase the number of DEIS schools participating.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Payments

702. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to restore farm assist payments to 2013 levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42354/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2017 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of €82.8 million on the farm

assist scheme.

Budget 2017 introduced measures in relation to the assessment of means for farm assist which reversed all changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013. These measures included that farm income would be assessed at 70% (down from 100%) with an additional annual means disregard of €254 for each of the first two children and €381 for the third and subsequent children. These improvements came into effect in March 2017.

In addition, Budget 2017 increased the rate of payment for farm assist by €5 per week to €193 per week.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

703. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if steps can be taken to restore payment in the case of a person (details supplied); if their case can be urgently investigated with a view to restoration of this or alternative appropriate payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42402/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Payment of Jobseeker's Allowance in the case of the person concerned has been suspended as information requested relating to spousal means has not been provided by the person concerned. It is not possible to progress a review of entitlement in the absence of the requested information. The person concerned has submitted an appeal to the Intreo Centre and a submission is currently being prepared for the Social Welfare Appeals Office which functions independently of the Department. The person concerned will be informed of the outcome on completion of the appeals process.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

704. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason jobseeker's allowance, JSA, has been terminated in the case of a person (details supplied); the reason a basic payment has not been made in lieu thereof; if the case can be urgently reviewed; if a full investigation surrounding the case can be made in view of suggestions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42411/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A jobseeker's allowance claim for the person concerned is currently under review as he failed to establish his residency at the stated address. The person concerned was interviewed by an Officer of the Department on 3/10/17 and has been requested to provide documentary evidence of his address within seven days.

According to our records no claim for Supplementary Welfare Allowance has been made by the person concerned. Proof of address is required in order to submit an application for supplementary welfare allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Nitrates Usage

705. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment if he will extend the slurry spreading deadline for farmers in view of recent wet weather which has deferred the work schedule of farmers on their lands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42618/17]

738. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the deadline for spreading slurry will be extended (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42229/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 705 and 738 together.

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

The closed periods in Ireland were decided following extensive consultation and were discussed with farming bodies and the European Commission when Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme was introduced. The provisions of the Regulations are underpinned by scientific research and good agricultural practice. The most recent scientific studies carried out on a diverse range of farm and soil types as part of Teagasc's on-going Agricultural Catchments Programme has provided further evidence in support of the efficacy of the current closed periods in reducing nutrient losses to waters. A key message from the research is that there are disproportionately high nutrient losses to waters during the winter and the current closed period coincides with the time during which risks of incidental nutrient losses to water are highest. Farmers are advised to spread slurry early in the season when growth and nutrient uptake are at their peak.

My Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have been closely monitoring the situation and have recognised that there may be some potential concerns for animal welfare arising from heavy rainfall in specific parts of the country (the north west in particular). Farmers with such concerns are advised to contact the Nitrates Section of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at (053) 9163444 or by email to nitrates@agriculture.gov.ie with details of the flooding and/or trafficability situation, their herd number and other relevant data. Such contact should be made by Saturday 14 October at the latest.

Farmers wishing to avail of such flexibility will be advised:

1. To spread only that volume of slurry necessary to ensure adequate storage capacity for the remainder of the closed period
2. That any spreading should occur as soon as good spreading conditions exist
3. That they will be prioritised for inspection by Local Authorities in the immediate future to ensure compliance with the Nitrates Regulations
4. That assessment of overall on-farm storage capacity may be part of that inspection process
5. That the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will subsequently contact the farmers to ascertain and record the date(s) on which this additional spreading takes place.

Local Authority inspection reports will be returned to my Department and will be shared with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and those farms needing to avail of this flexibility will become a priority category for inspections in future years also.

Water Charges Refunds

706. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will assess a proposal (details supplied) to assist the not-for-profit sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42720/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services recommended adherence to the principle of equity of treatment for those who have paid and have not paid their water charges since domestic charges were introduced. The Oireachtas approved the committee's report last April. In this context, the recently published Water Services Bill 2017 includes a provision to refund water charges and the Bill is currently being considered by the Oireachtas.

Irish Water is currently finalising a refunds plan. The guiding principle is that refunds will be made directly to the account holder. Irish Water is engaging with financial institutions to ensure that those who may wish to make a donation to charity from the refund are advised as to how they may do this.

Traveller Accommodation

707. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to ensure that the overcrowding in an area (details supplied) is addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42517/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

Management of Traveller sites, including the delivery and provision of accommodation, is a matter for the relevant housing authorities, in this case Cork City Council, and I have no function in the matter.

Traveller Accommodation

708. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the oversight his Department has over Traveller engagement officer positions it funds; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that part the traveller engagement officer role includes a requirement to visit tenants in social housing and Traveller-specific accommodation but that no visits have taken place in Cork City Council's area to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42519/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to en-

sure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

In addition to capital funding supports, my Department provides current funding to local authorities towards the cost of accommodation-related supports. This includes 90% of the salary costs of social workers employed by local authorities who work with Travellers in relation to accommodation issues. I have no role in relation to the day-to-day work and functions undertaken by the social workers, which is a matter for the relevant housing authorities, in this case Cork City Council.

Local Authority Boundaries

709. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it was his plan when setting the terms of reference of the Cork local government implementation oversight group that the boundary of Cork City Council would be altered in line with the recommendations of the Cork expert advisory group. [42542/17]

710. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Cork local government implementation oversight group will complete a detailed implementation plan for the boundary adjustment by September 2017 as per its terms of reference. [42543/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 709 and 710 together.

The Cork Local Government Implementation Oversight Group was established to oversee arrangements for the alteration of the boundary between the respective areas of jurisdiction of Cork City Council and Cork County Council, in light of the recommendation in the report of the Cork Expert Advisory Group.

The group's first task is to present a detailed Implementation Plan, and to engage with the two local authorities, with a view to developing detailed and comprehensive proposals for the boundary alteration and to ultimately oversee the implementation of agreed recommendations.

The detailed implementation plan is anticipated in the coming weeks, the output from which I will consider in due course.

Local Authority Boundaries

711. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the relationship between the proposals put forward under section 29 of the Local Government Act 1991 by Cork County Council and the work of the Cork local government implementation oversight group, including the implementation plan that it is producing for the alteration of the boundary between Cork City Council and Cork County Council. [42544/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The general responsibility of the Cork Local Government Implementation Oversight Group is to oversee arrangements for the alteration of the boundary between Cork City and County Councils. The Group's terms of reference are designed to facilitate and support the agreement of arrangements between the two local authorities.

Cork County Council has initiated a proposal for alteration of the boundary under Part V of

the Local Government Act 1991. As this proposal is the subject of a statutory process which may lead to an application for Ministerial decision, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the matter.

Housing Issues

712. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will roll out programmes which will disincentivise property investors from purchasing houses and ensure precedence is given to first-time buyers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42558/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A key priority for Government is to accelerate and increase the supply of new homes across all forms of housing, social housing, private market purchase and homes to rent. Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness sets out ambitious targets to, inter alia, double the annual level of new homes built to 25,000 by 2020 and to deliver an additional 47,000 social housing homes. The Plan also seeks to optimise the existing housing stock and to lay the foundations for a more vibrant and responsive private rented sector.

Just over one year into the plan, all of the key statistical indicators point to a significant scaling up of home building activity, with:

- Planning permissions granted for 19,246 new homes in the 12 months to the end of June 2017, an increase of 49% year on year;

- Commencement notices for 16,945 new homes notified to local authorities in the 12 months to the end August 2017, an increase of 47% year on year; and

- ESB residential connections of 17,651 to the end of August 2017, an increase of 25% year on year.

Preliminary figures from the Central Statistics Office's Quarterly Survey of Production for Q2 2017 show that the residential construction sector has grown by 20.5% in volume terms and 22.7% in value terms over the previous 12 months.

Specifically in terms of first-time buyers, the volume of mortgage drawdowns in the twelve months to the end of June 2017 has increased by 17%. The Help to Buy initiative for first-time buyers, introduced by the Minister for Finance in October 2016, continues to assist first-time buyers in obtaining the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new home. The incentive provides for a refund of up to €20,000 in Income Tax and Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) paid over the previous four tax years to first-time buyers.

Housing affordability has been examined across a range of interconnected policy areas in the context of the ongoing focused review of Rebuilding Ireland. A number of new and enhanced actions in this area have already been announced and I expect to make further announcements in the coming weeks as this work is finalised.

Planning Issues

713. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the guidance provided to local authorities with regard to planning applications for solar farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42573/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

There are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

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

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

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

Water Charges Administration

714. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the mechanisms that will be put in place for persons who suffer from health conditions which require heavy water usage such as Crohn's disease in view of the fact he has indicated that a charge will be applied for excessive use of water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42614/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services (JOCFFDWS) recommended that wilful wastage of water should be curbed. The Committee's Report was approved by the Oireachtas and the recently published Water Services Bill 2017 reflects the recommendations contained in the Report.

The Bill provides that households will be liable to pay for water services used above a certain threshold. The JOCFFDWS recommended that provision should be made for households where the excessive use of water is due to medical needs. The Bill provides for an exemption from the payment in such circumstances and the Minister can prescribe a range of matters relating to the exemption including the procedures to be followed when applying for an exemption, the time limits that will apply in respect of making an application and the information to be furnished by applicants. The matters involved will be addressed in Regulations to be made as soon as possible following enactment of the legislation.

Building Energy Rating Administration

715. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of BER certificates issued to date in 2017; the type of dwelling related to each BER issued, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42641/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), which comes under the auspices of my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, is the statutory agency responsible for the implementation and management of the Building Energy Rating (BER) Scheme, in accordance with Ireland's obligations under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (Recast). In accordance with these Regulations every new building has been required to have a BER Certificate since 1 January 2007 and furthermore any existing dwelling, offered for sale or letting on or after 1 January 2009, also requires a Building Energy Rating (BER) certificate.

My Department does not collate data on BER statistics. However, information, reporting and statistics in relation to the administration of the BER scheme are available on the SEAI website at <http://www.sei.ie/resources/publications/Domestic-BER-Statistics.pdf>.

Furthermore, the SEAI also provide BER statistics to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) which, in turn, publishes comprehensive quarterly bulletins which provide a detailed breakdown of BER ratings. This information is available on the CSO website at <http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/environment/>.

Local Authority Housing Provision

716. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses purchased by each local authority to be added to the social housing stock, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42658/17]

720. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding that remains available in 2017 for local authorities to purchase houses to add to their social housing stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42662/17]

721. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount that has been spent to date in 2017 by local authorities purchasing houses to add to their social housing stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42663/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 716, 720 and 721 together.

Under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme, funding is available to all local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments for social housing use.

Details on the number of properties purchased and built by all local authorities, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information on quarter two of 2017 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly, with information on quarter three of 2017 to follow thereafter. However, current projections are that in addition to the circa 400 new social homes delivered under

the acquisitions programme during quarter one, a further 270 approximately have been delivered in quarter two.

At the end of September 2017, expenditure under the local authority acquisitions programme was circa €165 million, including expenditure of €29 million self-funded by the local authorities from surplus local property tax receipts.

Acquisitions remain an important source of new social housing supply and funding remains available to support this activity. However, it is important that local authorities are selective in such actions so as to avoid, for example, impacting disproportionately on the private housing market. Also, the local authority construction programme is intensifying as we implement the measures under Rebuilding Ireland and, as recently announced, that is increasingly where local authorities will focus their resources in the years ahead.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

717. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social houses that he anticipates will finish construction between 10 October 2017 and the end of 2017; the estimated number of these that will be ready for occupation, by scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42659/17]

718. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social houses that have been built to date in 2017 and that are ready for occupation, by scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42660/17]

719. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to the Taoiseach's recent statement and his own comments that 3,800 social houses would be built in 2018, the locations these houses will be built, by scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42661/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 717 to 719, inclusive, together.

My Department publishes comprehensive status reports on a quarterly basis of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas, showing details such as their locations and a range of information relating to their advancement.

The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of quarter 2 of 2017; it contains information on the almost 700 schemes or phases of schemes - delivering 11,000 new social homes - currently approved and progressing through planning, design, construction. It also contains details of the homes delivered in 2016 and to the end of quarter 2 of 2017. The report can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>.

Over 100 of the listed projects are complete, involving over 1,100 new homes, all of which I would expect local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to have tenanted by now. A further 160 schemes were on site and under construction at end-quarter 2, which are delivering around 2,700 new homes. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates and tenanting, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and approved housing bodies. It will be these schemes that will form the basis for construction delivery between now and the end of 2017 and during 2018, when we are targeting the delivery of 3,800 newly built homes by local authorities and approved housing bodies under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes

and construction and turnkey developments.

My Department also publishes statistics on the number of properties constructed by all local authorities and approved housing bodies for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, which can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information on quarter two of 2017 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly, with information on quarter three of 2017 to follow thereafter.

In Budget 2017, an increased investment of €1.3 billion was provided for housing, which is supporting the delivery of over 21,000 social housing solutions this year. Over 5,000 of which will be delivered through our capital programme of building, acquiring, refurbishing and leasing homes to be made available to those on our social housing waiting lists.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing construction programme as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Questions Nos. 720 and 721 answered with Question No. 716.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

722. Deputy John Curran asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses that were completed and ready for occupation during 2016 in each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42664/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Over 19,000 households were housed last year under the range of Social Housing Programmes. Statistics on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies are published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

In terms of overall housing construction, the ESB residential connections dataset provides the best available indicator, at this point in time, that a residential unit is becoming available for occupation. A comprehensive list of the number of ESB residential connections, broken down by Local Authority area, from 1996 onwards is available through the following link on my Department's website: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-esb-connections>.

My Department and the CSO are working with the ESB in order to provide a more detailed breakdown of the ESB connections dataset. Once additional ESB data is received by the CSO, it will be further analysed and matched to other datasets with initial results expected by the end of the year.

In parallel, my Department, through a special Housing Data Analytics Group (HDAG), is also working with the CSO and other public sector bodies such as the Housing Agency, Central Bank, ESRI, Department of Finance, SOLAS and local authorities to further refine and improve housing activity statistics and data more generally. The HDAG is also consulting with residential construction industry sources on this topic.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

723. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42694/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 612 of 3 October 2017 which sets out the position in this matter.

Local Authority Management

724. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the corporate policy groups and strategic policy committees guidelines for the establishment and operation issued by his Department in June 2014 under section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by section 48 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 intended to expand the role, function and responsibilities of corporate policy groups beyond policy matters as defined by section 133(2)(a) of the 2001 Act (details supplied); if the corporate policy group would in this new role be empowered to organise the business of the elected council; if so, the reference in section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 48 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, from which such powers, functions or responsibilities sourced for inclusion in the guidelines issued by his Department are sourced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42707/17]

744. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the corporate policy groups and strategic policy committees guidelines for the establishment and operation issued by his Department in June 2014 (details supplied) intended to expand the role, function and responsibilities of corporate policy groups beyond policy matters (details supplied); if the corporate policy group in the new role would be empowered to organise the business of the elected council; if so, the location in section 133 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, in which such powers, functions or responsibilities are sourced for inclusion in the guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42392/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 724 and 744 together.

The Guidelines issued by my Department under section 133(10) of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, in relation to the Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs), and section 54(2) of the same Act in relation to Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), provide a common general framework for the establishment and operation of the CPG and SPC structures.

The roles of the CPG is strategic in that it links and co-ordinates the work of the different SPCs. In this regard, the CPG may advise and assist the elected council in policy matters, the preparation of a draft corporate plan and the preparation of a draft budget for the local authority. The CPG may also promote co-ordination and avoidance of duplication in the discharge of reserved functions as between municipal districts and the local authority.

Full decision-making authority remains with the elected council. As independent statutory bodies it is a matter for each local authority to establish and operate its own CPG in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions and the guidelines issued thereunder.

Water Services Infrastructure

725. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department is preparing a policy to deal with abandoned water assets such as unused water towers; if so, the details of the policy; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42713/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the transfer, by Ministerial Order, of the property of a water services authority (a city or county council) to Irish Water. Up to the end of September 2017, eleven Ministerial Orders have been made to transfer water services assets, including underground assets, from the local authorities to Irish Water.

In relation to obsolete assets, it was not envisaged by the legislative framework that assets no longer deployed for or not intrinsically linked to water services purposes would transfer to Irish

Water. The Water Services Reform Implementation Group which includes representatives from my Department, local authorities and Irish Water, is currently considering the approach to be taken in relation to a range of water services legacy issues following the establishment of Irish Water. These issues include the approach to be taken with regard to dealing with obsolete water services assets.

Seaweed Harvesting Licences

726. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if seaweed harvesters, who for more than 20 years have been cutting seaweed on a set area of State-owned foreshore and or taking dislodged seaweed cast up on a particular stretch of seashore, can register their traditional rights under the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009; the other options available to register their traditional right; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42748/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have no statutory role in the registration of rights under the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act. Under the Foreshore Act 1933, I am responsible for regulating the harvesting of wild seaweed. My Department has been engaged in extensive consultations with key stakeholders and the Attorney General with a view to bringing forward a modern regulatory foreshore regime that harnesses the economic potential within our marine environment, while also protecting and managing this unique resource. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on developments in this regard before the end of the year.

Ministerial Functions

727. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42783/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are two Ministers of State assigned to my Department, Minister of State Damien English

and Minister of State John Paul Phelan.

A range of responsibilities in the areas of Planning, Housing, Marine and Foreshore, and Fire Services have been assigned to Minister of State English. These functions include oversight of the implementation of local authority Development Plans and Local Area Plans; aspects of student accommodation relevant to my Department; responsibility for the Approved Housing Bodies (Regulation) Bill and establishment of a statutory Regulator as well as coordination of the Government response to Unfinished Housing Developments and housing for older people, people with a disability and policy surrounding Traveller accommodation; functions under the Foreshore Act 1933, including assessment of foreshore leases and licences; and responsibility for the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

The detailed legislative powers delegated to Minister English are outlined in the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No. 2) Order 2017, which was signed on 26 July 2017.

These powers and responsibilities have changed somewhat since 14 June 2017. In his previous role as Minister of State in the then Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Minister of State English had responsibilities in relation to certain elements of Housing and Planning along with certain responsibilities in the Community area which have now transferred to the Department of Rural and Community Development. The related legislative powers which were delegated to Minister of State English under my predecessor are outlined in the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 which was signed on 28 March 2017.

Responsibility for substantial elements of policy and legislation in the areas of Local Government and Electoral Reform have been assigned to Minister of State Phelan. The preparation of an Order to delegate the extensive associated legislative powers is well underway and the final Order is expected to be submitted to Government in the coming weeks.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

728. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the requirement being made of families who are in mortgage and financial distress to pay their water charges before they are allowed to participate in the mortgage-to-rent scheme in view of the ending of water charges and the process of repayment of these charges. [42841/17]

734. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons who have been approved for the mortgage to rent scheme; the number of persons that have successfully achieved a completed mortgage to rent; and the number of persons that have been forced to pay for outstanding water charges before they can avail of a mortgage to rent agreement. [42933/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 728 and 734 together.

Since the introduction of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme in 2012, a total of 3,765 cases have been submitted under the scheme to the end of September 2017. Of the 3,765 cases submitted, 2,909 were ineligible or terminated during the process. Of the remaining cases submitted, 282 have been completed, and the remaining 574 are actively being progressed.

The Housing Agency publishes, on a quarterly basis, detailed statistical information on the

operation of the MTR scheme. This information is available on the Agency's website at the following link: <https://www.housingagency.ie/our-services/housing-supply-services/mortgage-to-rent.aspx>.

Under Section 3(A) of the Water Services Act 2014 (inserted by Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015) an owner of a dwelling who proposes to sell that dwelling shall, before completion of the sale, pay to Irish Water any charge in respect of the dwelling which is payable by the owner. The owner must also provide to his or her solicitor either a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming that any charge in respect of the dwelling owed to Irish Water has been paid or a statement from Irish Water that any charge in respect of the dwelling is not the liability of the owner.

Irish Water are still accepting payments where there is an outstanding balance and issuing a Certificate of Discharge. These people will be entitled to a refund once the Water Services Bill 2017, which I am currently bringing through the Houses of the Oireachtas, is enacted.

Housing Agency

729. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the membership of the working group established by the Housing Agency; the position of each; the number of times the group has met; the input the group has had into the national vacant housing reuse strategy; the nature of the input; if he will provide a copy of its submission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42845/17]

730. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the national vacant housing reuse strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42846/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 729 and 730 together.

Action 5.1 of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland, which was published in July 2016, commits to the development of a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy informed by Census 2016 data, to-

- inform the compilation of a register of vacant units across the country,
- identify the number, location and reasons for longer-term vacancies (i.e. over 6 months) in high demand areas, and
- set out a range of actions to bring vacant units back into reuse.

The Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the Strategy, established a working group in September 2016 comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities, the Irish Council for Social Housing and from the Housing Agency itself to inform the Strategy. The working group met 6 times between November 2016 and March 2017.

My Department received the output of the working group in June 2017 and is presently engaging with key Departments and Agencies with a view to finalising the strategy and publishing it in the near future.

731. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the register of vacant sites for Galway city and county; the number and location of vacant sites on the register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42847/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

Planning authorities are presently engaging in the necessary preparatory work, prior to the application of the levy with effect from January 2019 in respect of sites identified on the register in 2018. As required under the Act, this includes the identification of specific vacant sites for entry on the register as well as the registered owners of the sites in question along with undertaking a site valuation. Vacant site registers were established in January 2017 by planning authorities and the registers will be populated as the preparatory work progresses during the year.

At this time, Galway City and Galway County Council are undertaking the necessary preparatory work before entering sites on their register. A number of sites have been identified in Galway City as possibly falling under the levy requirements. The Council is currently ascertaining the ownership of these sites and whether they meet the criteria to have the levy applied. Furthermore, in the county area, the Council is presently engaged in an assessment of all potential vacant sites in the County as part of a review of Statutory Local Area Plans, in accordance with the provisions of the legislation.

Local Authority Housing Provision

732. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and location of units purchased by Galway City Council and Galway County Council under the buy-and-renew scheme; the number that have been made available for social housing; the expected date by which the remaining units will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42848/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Buy & Renew initiative is in the early stages of being implemented across all local authorities. However, we are seeing positive signs of its potential to deliver new social housing units, in addition to the other advantages it can bring of supporting strategies on vacant homes and urban renewal.

Its implementation as part of the range of programmes to deliver social housing and tackle vacancy are matters, in the first place, for the local authorities themselves. I understand that both Galway local authorities have undertaken promotional and awareness campaigns following the introduction of the Buy & Renew and Repair & Lease initiatives. I further understand they are pursuing some properties identified through this process, while others may not prove suitable. I recognise that achieving social housing delivery through schemes such as Buy & Renew is likely to be more resource-intensive for the local authorities than other delivery streams, such as acquiring good quality housing. Sourcing the owners of vacant properties

and undertaking remediation works will draw on resources, albeit it can present new sources of properties for social housing while tackling vacancy.

Both the Galway authorities are actively engaged in identifying properties suitable for acquisition, including properties in reasonable condition and vacant properties under the Buy & Renew Scheme. In the period since 2016, they have been successful in acquiring over 50 new social homes in various locations, 5 of which are under the Buy & Renew Scheme.

I have requested the local authorities in the main cities to develop and adopt Vacant Homes Action Plans by the end of October, with a deadline for all other County Action Plans to be completed by end-2017. I expect the preparation of these Plans will assist the authorities in developing a fuller understanding of the current vacancy levels in their functional areas, to ascertain where empty homes are located and who owns these vacant properties, and then to prioritise and target those areas where housing demand is most acute.

Local Authority Housing Provision

733. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties acquired by Galway City Council and Galway County Council in relation to the repair and leasing scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42849/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was piloted in Carlow and Waterford and has been rolled out nationally since 23 February last. My Department has been working intensively with local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to develop and implement the scheme and individual targets have been set for local authorities for 2017. The scheme is one of a suite of measures available to local authorities to bring vacant properties back into use.

Data for Galway City Council and Galway County Council, based on the first full three months of activity of the scheme at end June 2017, are set out in the following table. While no Agreements to Lease have been signed to date, the process of finalising units is underway and I expect a number of agreements will be signed shortly. My Department is currently gathering data from local authorities in order to report progress in Quarter 3.

Feedback from local authorities indicates that in many cases properties requiring extensive repair work and therefore not suitable for the RLS, have been secured under the Buy and Renew Scheme which facilitates local authorities or approved housing bodies to purchase vacant properties for social housing use.

Local Authority	Number of applications received	Number of evaluations completed	Properties deemed SUITABLE	Properties deemed UNSUITABLE
Galway City Council	1	1	1	0
Galway County Council	44	28	6	22

Question No. 734 answered with Question No. 728.

Disability Services Provision

735. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the body responsible for ensuring that disability access and facilities are main-

tained to suitable standards in retail buildings in which these facilities exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42942/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): New buildings and extensions or material alterations to existing buildings must comply with the legal minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations 1997 - 2017. In this context, the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements that a building must achieve in respect of access. The TGDs are available on my Department's website at

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/tgd-part-d-materials-and-workmanship/technical-guidance-documents>.

The requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- new buildings other than dwellings are accessible and usable;
- extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;
- material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;
- certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings where practicable; and
- new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions, where practicable and appropriate.

While the latest iteration of Part M of the Building Regulations initially coincided with the general downturn in economic and construction activity, its positive effects on access and use in the built environment will now be seen more widely as economic recovery takes hold and construction activity continues to gather momentum and moves onto a sustainable footing.

While the provisions of the Building Regulations do not relate to management or maintenance of buildings and compliance with the Regulations is not dependent on these, it is acknowledged that they are important functions and contribute to the ongoing accessibility of the building. Important issues which are generally the responsibility of the management and/or maintenance teams include:

- arranging furniture appropriately;
- keeping circulation routes clear, facilities clean, equipment (lifts, communication aids, etc.) functioning;
- carrying out maintenance audits on a regular basis;
- putting a detailed emergency action plan in place to ensure safe egress for all in the event of an emergency;

- procurement of accessible goods and services (office furniture, security services, etc.);
- providing pre-visit information regarding access to the building on the organisation's website;
- providing information on the accessibility features of the building to occupants, in order to allow for effective management procedures to be put in place.

Guidance on how to design, build and manage buildings and spaces so that they can be readily accessed and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability is available in 'Building for Everyone, A Universal Design Approach', a National Disability Authority (NDA) publication, which may be accessed at www.nda.ie.

Separate to requirements under the Building Regulations, the building control regulations require, in the case of commercial buildings and apartment blocks, that a Disability Access Certificate be obtained from the local building control authority. A Disability Access Certificate is a certificate which specifies that the works or building to which the application relates will, if carried out in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, comply with the requirements of Part M of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations. It is an offence to occupy or use a building without having a valid Disability Access Certificate in place as required.

Finally, it is open to any person to refer a discrimination complaint to the Equality Tribunal under the Equal Status Acts 2000 – 2015, which prohibits discrimination on nine specified grounds including that of disability. It should also be noted that requirements set out under equality legislation are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Dumping at Sea

736. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 256 of 13 December 2016, if his Department has received the final legal advice referred to in same on the placing of material on State-owned foreshore without consent at a location (details supplied) in County Galway; the actions taken since to address this matter further to such advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42966/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Correspondence is continuing between the State's legal service and Solicitors representing a named party seeking to have the named party remove the material placed in the Mud Dock with the aim of having the matter resolved as soon as possible.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

737. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which his Department has provided social housing in line with A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43016/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Policy responsibility for A Vision for Change, which is being implemented by the HSE in conjunction with other agencies, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

The National Housing Strategy for People With a Disability (NHSPWD) 2011 - 2016 and associated National Implementation Framework, were jointly published by my Department and

the Department of Health. They set out the Government's broad framework for the delivery of housing for people with disabilities through mainstream housing policy and were developed as part of a coherent framework, in conjunction with the Government's mental health policy, A Vision for Change, and Congregated Settings Report. The partnership approach adopted under the Strategy recognises that the provision of suitable housing is only one element in supporting people with disabilities to live fully inclusive lives. Building on the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to meet the housing needs of people with disabilities, the NHSPWD has been extended to 2020 to continue to deliver on its aims.

Implementation of identified actions in the NHSPWD is being driven primarily by the Housing Agency by means of a dedicated sub-group comprising representatives from my Department, the Health Service Executive (HSE), Department of Health, local authorities, the Irish Council for Social Housing and various disability representative organisations. Through that forum, a Steering Group has been recently established to progress actions under Strategic Aim 5 of the NHSPWD in relation to meeting the housing needs of people with a mental health disability.

Question No. 738 answered with Question No. 705.

Disability Services Provision

739. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the financial assistance by way of grants or schemes for persons (details supplied) to enhance and improve their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42242/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department funds a range of housing supports for persons with a disability, living in both privately owned housing and local authority housing. Applications in all cases are made to the local authority.

The Disabled Person Grant Scheme provides funds to local authorities to undertake adaptations and extensions to homes to meet the needs of local authority tenants with a disability, or to address serious overcrowding. The Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for Older People and People with a Disability is also delivered by local authorities with funding from my Department. It assists people with a disability in private houses to have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. There are no restrictions on the type of disability covered by the schemes and the administration of the available funding is a matter for the local authorities based on their assessment of priority and need at the time.

National Planning Framework

740. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the population and demographic projections for the next 20 years underpinning the approach to the national planning framework - Ireland 2040 Our Plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42279/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The purpose of both the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the corresponding Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) is to set long-term national and regional development frameworks within which Government Departments and Agencies, the regional assemblies and

local authorities, as well as wider private sector and community interests will work together to ensure proper planning and sustainable development and the optimal development of the country as a whole, in a national, regional and ultimately local context.

In developing the NPF, it was considered important to establish a strong empirical evidence base to support policy formulation. In this regard, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), which is an independent research institute with established competence in the type of specialist economic and demographic modelling work required for preparation of the NPF, were commissioned by my Department to carry out relevant research and development. Key features of its research approach are its strong empirical base, its social and economic policy focus and its coverage of many of the major areas of relevance to current policy issues in Ireland and the European Union.

The ESRI conducted economic and demographic modelling and continues to prepare future projections in respect of Ireland's population and economy in the years ahead to 2040. This included the establishment of a new national economic model to generate the type of economic and demographic data required to inform the NPF and assess the impacts of various policy options. A key aspect of this work was the development of demographic forecasts, based on past trends, and the generation of a range of future spatial development scenarios. These future scenarios were then tested against the assembled forecast data to inform the future national and regional development scenarios in the NPF, with the NPF indicating approximately an additional 1 million population by 2040 in Ireland.

Over the coming weeks, it is my intention to publish a number of reports underpinning the publication of the Ireland 2040: Our Plan Framework. This will include an ESRI Demographic and Econometric modelling report, setting out full details in relation to the population and demographic projections.

Lobbying Data

741. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42294/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government(Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Owing to the scope of my remit as Minister, I receive representations from a wide range of parties, including public representatives, local and voluntary groups and private individuals and organisations.

A small number of representations were received in my Department in connection with the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. These were forwarded directly to the Department of Health as it is within its area of responsibility.

At their request, I met the following who sought an opportunity to discuss the Alcohol Bill with me:

10 July 2017 - Rosemary Garth, Director of Communications & Corporate Affairs, Irish Distillers;

Brid Murphy, Red Flag Consulting.

26 July 2017 - Jonathan McDade, Senior Executive, the Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland (trade association);

Liam Reid, Corporate Relations Director, Diageo;

Barry Costello, Trade Marketing Controller, Edward Dillon;

Martin Mackin, Q4PR.

I noted the views expressed at the meetings and indicated that the matters involved should be pursued with the Minister for Health.

The Deputy will be aware that the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 provides that the Standards in Public Office Commission, an independent body, is the Registrar of Lobbying. The Act is designed to provide information to the public about who is lobbying whom about what. It also provides for the establishment and maintenance of a register of persons who carry on lobbying activities and for a code of conduct relating to carrying on lobbying activities. The Registrar has pointed out that lobbying is an essential part of the democratic process, which enables or facilitates citizens and organisations to make their views on public policy and public services known to politicians and public servants. The Standards in Public Office Commission has established an easily searchable and free to use online register of lobbying at www.lobbying.ie.

Wind Energy Guidelines

742. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to open the public consultation process for the draft wind energy guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42339/17]

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:

h <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 public consultation as part of the SEA process will be undertaken in early 2018.

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.

Health and Safety Regulations

743. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the legislation or regulations in place in relation to the protection of health and safety of children in privately owned recreational facilities such as theme parks, amusement centres and activity parks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42351/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 239 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 places a statutory duty on organisers of funfairs and owners of fairground equipment to take such care as is reasonable for ensuring that persons at a funfair do not suffer injury or damage by reason of dangers arising from the funfair or associated activities. This legislation also requires that the owner of fairground equipment shall not make it available to the public unless such equipment has a valid certificate of safety. The organiser of a funfair is required to give notice of the event to the relevant local authority and such notice is to be accompanied by a valid certificate of safety.

My Department commenced an internal review process on the issue of safety at funfairs/fairground equipment earlier this year. The review of the aspects of legislation relating to regulation of fairground equipment and funfairs in section 239 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, particularly in respect of the specific legislative provisions relating to fairground equipment, is on-going and includes an examination of international practice in the area of regulating public safety. The drafting of the review report has commenced and further engagement with relevant stakeholders is envisaged as part of the process of clarifying issues and preparing the report's conclusions and recommendations.

Question No. 744 answered with Question No. 724.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

745. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the changes that have been made in 2017 to the mortgage to rent scheme; his plans to further modify the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42441/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the MTR scheme in order for it to work better for borrowers.

The Review, available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the avenues and impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. Key changes include:

- Lenders are now required to formally communicate with borrowers as to why they are not suitable for the scheme.

- The property price threshold for a house in Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow has been increased to €365,000 (from €350,000) while the threshold for an apartment / townhouse in these areas is being increased to €310,000 (from €300,000). For the rest of the country, the threshold for a house has been increased to €280,000 (from €250,000) and for an apartment / townhouse to €210,000 (from €190,000).

- Flexibility has been provided in relation to the size of properties which qualify for the scheme. In practical terms, this means that an assessment of the property size suitable to a particular household now allows for a maximum of two additional bedrooms in the property above

the actual needs of the household, with the property still being considered eligible.

- The administrative process has been streamlined including certain steps of the MTR process now being required to be completed prior to the submission of a completed MTR application to the Housing Agency.

- There are a number of actions to improve knowledge and understanding of the scheme. A range of state agencies are being facilitated to assist and guide borrowers who could benefit from the scheme.

My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households.

The Review also concluded that the current financial model of the MTR scheme may not, in its current configuration, be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. In order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency has been working with a number of financial entities who have expressed an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of alternative long-term lease arrangements. In advance of these pilots and to establish the operability of an alternative financing approach, a targeted market testing exercise has been undertaken by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangement to ascertain if they would be viable for a MTR cohort taking account of the necessity to provide a long-term stable solution for eligible households.

The responses to the market testing exercise have been reviewed by the Housing Agency and my Department and the next step is to issue a formal call for Expressions of Interest from bodies interested in pursuing pilot operating models. Once the Expressions of Interest process is concluded, the Housing Agency will make recommendations to my Department as to the make-up of the pilots which can then be initiated. The drafting of the content of the Expressions of Interest Request is underway and is expected to issue shortly.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

746. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on the number of personnel now recruited to the Defence Forces; and the strength of the Reserve. [40677/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel; comprising 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel, as set out in the White Paper on Defence. As there is significant turnover of personnel, targeted recruitment has been and is taking place. In that regard, 449 personnel joined the Permanent Defence Force between 1 January 2017 and 30 September 2017. This includes 99 Cadets inducted in September.

It is anticipated that 800 personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force by the end of 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers. A new recruitment campaign is under way with a closing date of 27 October 2017. This will provide a panel from which recruits will be drawn in 2018.

The current effective strength (as of 31 August 2017) of the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) is set out in the table:

-	No.
Army Reserve (AR)	1,789
Naval Service Reserve (NSR)	127
Total	1,916

98 personnel have been inducted to the AR and NSR to date this year (30 September 2017) as follows:

- 82 Army Reserve
- 16 Naval Service Reserve

I remain committed to increasing recruitment to both the PDF, the AR and NSR. In the context of both finite resources and personnel, it is necessary to strike an appropriate balance in terms of PDF and RDF recruitment, to deliver the desired effects of maintaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to undertake all roles assigned to it by Government.

Military Medals

747. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the date on which the surviving veterans of the siege of Jadotville and the family members of deceased veterans will be presented with their medals; the details of the design; and the status of the medals. [42466/17]

750. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the date on which the surviving veterans of the siege of Jadotville and the family members of deceased veterans will be presented with their medals; and the design and status of the medals. [42212/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 747 and 750 together.

The former Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD, and I decided on the 13th June last to award a medal to the men of “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion and, in the case of those members who are deceased, to their next of kin, to give full and due recognition in honour of the courageous actions of the men during the siege at Jadotville in September 1961. This fully recognises their bravery and courage during the unique circumstances of the Siege of Jadotville. This was an initiative I had been working on for some time and I was privileged to be able to take the decision to award a medal to the men of “A” Company.

Officials in my Department have been progressing the regulatory issues around the awarding of a specially commissioned medal, An Bonn Jadotville (The Jadotville Medal). I have recently approved the design of the medal and production of the medals is ongoing. As I recently announced, the presentation ceremony will take place on Saturday 2nd December 2017 in Custume Barracks, Athlone. I also outlined the details of the medal design in a press release on 5th October 2017.

The medal depicts a warrior of the ancient Fianna with sword and shield. To the left is a reproduction of the Irish overseas flash. Surrounding the central motif are the words “Cosaint Chalma” (Valiant Defence) and “Misneach” (Courage). The reverse contains a unique unit identification representing “A” Company, 35 Cathlán Éireannach (Irish Battalion). The word “Jadotville” is depicted on the clasp of the medal and the medal ribbon represents a combination of an Irish tricolour and the United Nations Operation in Congo (ONUC) mission medal.

Defence Forces Remuneration

748. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the payroll savings as a consequence of the reduced manning levels of the Defence Forces being below establishment in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the items these monetary savings have been applied to, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42469/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Permanent Defence Force (PDF) pay subhead on the Defence Vote is fully funded to meet the pay costs of the approved strength of 9,500 personnel. Numbers have fallen below the approved strength in the period referenced despite ongoing recruitment to the PDF. Historically high levels of recruitment are currently being pursued, with 690 personnel recruited in 2016 and over 800 personnel due to be taken in by the end of this year. These numbers include general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers.

Payroll savings have arisen on the PDF pay subhead of the Defence Vote as follows:

Permanent Defence Force (PDF) Pay Estimate and Outturn from 2012 to 2017

PDF PAY	2012 €m	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m
Estimate	425	423	422	418	416	417
Outturn	395	413	396	390	386	297 (end-Sept)
Savings	30	10	26	28	30	N/A

Where payroll savings have arisen due to numbers falling below the target strength, these savings, and savings from other subheads, have been used to fund priority projects in various other subheads, in accordance with strategic policy objectives, as outlined in the White Paper.

Ministerial Functions

749. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the powers he has delegated to the Ministers of State in his Department; the date on which such delegation was made; if there were changes in powers delegated relative to the situation in place prior to 14 June 2017; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42777/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 (S.I. No. 299 of 2017) was approved by Government on 5 July 2017 and came into effect on that date. Pursuant to the Order, statutory responsibility for a wide range of Defence matters has been delegated to me. The principal responsibilities delegated include powers to make Regulations under various provisions of the Defence Acts 1954 to 2015 and powers in respect of personnel-related issues affecting members of the Defence Forces. The powers delegated to me under the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 are, essentially, the same as the powers delegated under the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 314 of 2016) with the exception of some minor changes. As part of the preparation of the 2017 Order, an examination took place of the statutory provisions specified in the 2016 Order. Following on from this examination, statutory powers conferred on the Minister for Defence under the Criminal Justice (Surveillance) Act 2009 (sections 9, 10 and 13) and the Geneva Conventions (Amendment) Act 1998 (sections 9 and 10) were included in the 2017 Order.

Question No. 750 answered with Question No. 747.

Departmental Reports

751. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has published the University of Limerick focus group report on the Defence Forces in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42265/17]

752. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps he has taken in relation to addressing the negative findings of the focus group report on the Defence Forces in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42266/17]

753. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has met with the representative associations in September 2017 in response to the focus group report findings on the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42267/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take questions numbers 751 to 753, inclusive, together.

The report referred to by the Deputy was published on my Department's website on 20 July 2017. The report is a follow up to the first phase of the Climate Study and it further explores the issues raised in the original survey. I was briefed on the Report at the end of June and I met with the Representative Associations on the 13th July 2017, ahead of its official publication.

I tasked civil and military management with examining the report and identifying those issues which are priorities. While work to progress many of the issues was already underway as part of the implementation of the White Paper on Defence, I have directed that certain White Paper projects be brought forward and that work commence on these immediately.

I have directed civil and military management to initiate a broader view of contracts for enlisted personnel and to bring forward recommendations for my consideration. I have also requested proposals in respect of retaining specialists, providing for re-entry and where appropriate, direct entry, for my consideration and I expect to be in receipt of these shortly.

In addition to the above, I have decided to initiate a review of the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. This will commence by the end of 2017.

I did not meet with the Representative Associations in September, but I intend to meet them in the coming weeks to further discuss the issues raised in the climate survey.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

754. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has responded to requests from RACO in 2016 and 2017 to review both the national level industrial relations structures of the Defence Forces representation and internal Defence Forces conciliation and arbitration scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42268/17]

755. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to align equivalent industrial relations structures of the Defence Forces with changes planned for the An Garda Síochána associations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42269/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 754 and 755 together.

I can advise the Deputy, as I announced recently, that I intend to initiate a review of the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. The review

will start by the end of 2017 and will be guided by an independent chairperson.

Work has commenced on drawing up the terms of reference for the review and I hope to circulate these to the Representative Associations for their information, in the coming weeks.

Lobbying Data

756. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of occasions on which he has been lobbied in respect of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill since March 2016; the persons he has met with; the dates of these meetings; the details of the basis of the lobbying; his views on the issues raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42288/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On the 18 July 2017, I met with the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland and on 24 July 2017, I met with the Wexford Vintners Federation of Ireland in relation to the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill.

Naval Service Expenditure

757. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 289 of 28 September 2017, if the fuel costs quoted of €56,600 refer to full costs of the return journey from Cork to London, or only the fuel costs relating to the part of the journey that did not include travelling through the Irish exclusive economic zone en route to the UK; and if so, the fuel costs for the full return journey [42374/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I outlined to the Deputy in my response to Parliamentary Question Number 289 of 28 September 2017, LÉ Samuel Beckett departed the Naval Base in Haulbowline on 8 September, and carried out fishery protection and maritime surveillance duties while in the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) en route to the UK. The vessel was berthed alongside the DSEI exhibition centre from 10 September until 16 September, when she departed London for Haulbowline, carrying out further fishery protection and maritime surveillance duties within the EEZ while en route to Cork.

The estimated fuel costs for the duration of €56,600 as set out in my previous reply refer to the full fuel costs incurred on the full return journey from Cork to London.