

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

7. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated figures of Part V housing for 2018 and 2019; the estimated cost of this housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45284/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As set out in Rebuilding Ireland, it is anticipated that 4,700 Part V units will be secured for social housing. Just under 1,700 of these units will be delivered in 2018 and 2019, with 590 expected in 2018 and 1,100 in 2019. The annual increasing delivery expectation of Part V is consistent with the pace of increasing private housing construction activity.

With regard to costs, the Planning and Development Acts set out the methodology for calculating the net monetary value of units under Part V agreements. Section 96(3)(d)(ii) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 sets out that the construction costs to be paid to the developer in respect of the construction of units are “the costs, including normal construction and development costs and profit on those costs, calculated at open market rates that would have been incurred by the planning authority had it retained an independent builder to undertake the works, including the appropriate share of any common development works, as agreed between the authority and the developer.”

My Department supports local authorities and approved housing bodies to secure new social homes through the Part V mechanism using financial assistance from my Department under a variety of social housing financing programmes. In addition, some local authorities can acquire Part V units directly using their own funding and therefore, full details on such transactions would not be available to my Department. Given that the cost and output of units delivered through Part V is a matter in the first place for local authorities to agree with developers, local authorities welcome this flexibility in funding arrangements.

Overall, the funding earmarked for the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is being increased from €5.35bn to over €6 billion. Part V is a critical component of that delivery and, according as decisions are made on the delivery mechanism to be used to fund Part V units in individual developments, the necessary funding will be made available to the relevant local authorities and approved housing bodies.

Questions Nos. 8 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Nitrates Usage

13. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will extend the slurry spreading closing date of 15 October for a further two weeks in view of the very challenging weather conditions of the past two months which has resulted in significant backlogs in getting slurry spread; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41650/17]

53. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will extend the slurry spreading deadline of 14 October 2017 to enable farmers to spread when conditions allow in view of the extremely wet weather conditions in parts of the country over the past six to eight weeks which has prevented the spread of slurry. [41893/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 and 53 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 Nitrates Directive requires all member states to define set periods when the land application of fertiliser, including slurry, is not allowed and in Ireland the closed season commenced on 15 October.

It was recognised that the exceptional rainfall in recent weeks has created difficulties for slurry spreading in certain parts of the country resulting in animal welfare concerns. My Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine agreed an appropriate response and farmers with concerns about the impact of recent rainfall on their ability to complete the land-spreading of slurry were advised to contact the Nitrates Section of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with details of the flooding/trafficability situation, their herd number and other relevant data in advance of the closed period commencing on 15 October.

I understand that 578 farmers out of a total number of bovine farmers of 109,000 contacted the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in this regard. The Nitrates Section of that Department will now be making follow-up contact with each of those farmers.

Farmers who contacted the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in this regard were 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 would 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 could be part of that inspection process
5. That the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine would subsequently contact the farmers to ascertain and record the date(s) on which this additional spreading takes place.

Subsequent 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.

I am satisfied that the concerns regarding farmers' inability to spread slurry within the required timeframe have been adequately dealt with in a proportional and sensible manner.

Question No. 14 answered orally.

Homeless Accommodation Funding

15. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the midlands region receives a disproportionate homeless allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45253/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are set out in section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under that section, funding is provided annually to local authorities, on a regional basis, and the responsibility for the disbursement of funding is delegated to a lead-authority in each region. The counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath make up the midlands region and Westmeath County Council is the agreed regional lead-authority.

The midlands region housing authorities were allocated €800,000 in Exchequer funding for 2017, in respect of their programme for planned and contracted expenditure for homeless services and accommodation. In addition, my Department has also made payments of over €232,000 in 2017 to the midlands region arising from increased levels of homeless presentation. These costs include temporary emergency accommodation for families.

Given the current level of homelessness in the midlands, comprising 67 adults and 47 dependents, which represents 1.36% of the national total, and having regard to the fact that the midlands region's percentage drawdown of national funding has averaged at 1.27% over the last three years, I do not consider that the region receives a disproportionate allocation.

However, as is the case with all regions, I can assure the Deputy if further funding is required for homeless services in the midlands region, I will consider the matter.

Question No. 16 answered orally.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

17. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the process that homeless persons must go through when there is no placement available for them from the DRHE to be satisfactory in view of the chronic shortage of both emergency placements and hotel and guesthouse accommodation; his plans to make changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45302/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. My Department does not have a role in relation to operational issues, such as placements into emergency accommodation, which are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

In relation to the Deputy's query, I am aware that Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) staff are available on a daily basis to meet with newly homeless persons, as they pres-

ent to the Central Placement Unit. On presentation, the DRHE will make an initial assessment with regard to the homeless person or household's accommodation options and will arrange temporary accommodation, as required. Those that have presented previously can access the Homeless Helpline until 1am nightly, where their options and possible need for temporary accommodation will be assessed. When a family presents out-of-hours, the dedicated Family Homeless Action Team will work with them to secure hotel accommodation for the night, following which a more detailed assessment of their requirements takes place the next day.

If it is the case that commercial accommodation cannot be accessed late at night, contingency accommodation and arrangements for families are in place but are intended for use only as a last resort when all other options that night have been explored.

It is intended that the long-term housing needs of households in emergency accommodation will be met through a range of social housing supports, such as the HAP scheme and through general social housing allocations. In addition, housing authorities are delivering custom-developed facilities, referred to as family hubs, which offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability and more coordinated needs assessment and support than is possible in hotel accommodation.

Notwithstanding the continued level of homeless presentations, considerable progress is being made in securing long-term accommodation solutions for individuals and families in emergency accommodation. Over 3,000 sustainable exits from homelessness into independent tenancies were achieved in 2016, and this accelerated further during the first half of 2017 when over 2,000 such exits were achieved. Securing long-term sustainable housing solutions for homeless households will continue to be the subject of priority attention.

Social and Affordable Housing

18. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an affordable housing scheme to guide councils in providing affordable homes and to ensure that affordable homes will remain affordable into the future, even if there is a change of ownership, will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45303/17]

42. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the income limits for households to access affordable housing in his Department's plans such as the local infrastructure housing activation fund, the second LIHAF and local authority support as set out in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45247/17]

43. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the affordable housing scheme or assistance to lower income persons and families to purchase a home that his Department is examining; the reason no such proposals were brought forward in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45100/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18, 42 and 43 together.

Housing affordability has been examined by my Department, in consultation with the Housing Agency, local authorities and other stakeholders as part of the targeted review of Rebuilding Ireland. The examination was carried out under the generally accepted premise that housing is deemed affordable where households, particularly low or moderate income households, are paying no more than a third of their disposable income on meeting their accommodation

needs.

The work took account of the measures already taken to make housing more affordable. These include the streamlined planning system for large-scale housing developments; reduced development contributions; the €226 million LIHAF funding, the impact of Rent Pressure Zones and changes to apartment guidelines in 2015.

It also took account of the additional housing affordability measures contained in Budget 2018. As announced, there will be a second phase of the LIHAF infrastructure fund with an Exchequer contribution of €50 million to unlock additional lands for housing. I also secured funding to put in place a new serviced sites fund of €25 million specifically to deliver affordable housing on local authority sites. The new Home Building Finance Ireland fund is also of importance in terms of addressing the costs of delivering housing as it will provide finance at commercially competitive rates to developers.

The review is now at an advanced stage and I expect to be in a position to outline the outcome, including any additional measures, in the coming weeks.

Housing Adaptation Grant Eligibility

19. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to conduct a review of the terms and conditions of the housing grant scheme to allow local authorities to use discretion in the awarding of house repair grants for older persons, such as in the case in which a person has transferred ownership of their home over to one of their children but they will still continue to live in their home in order that they would be entitled to apply for and receive grant approval for works on the merits of their own income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45308/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): For the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, household income is calculated as the annual gross income in the previous tax year of all household members over 18, or over 23 if in full-time education, with the exclusion of Family Income Supplement, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance if paid in respect of the person to whom the grant application relates. Also €5,000 is disregarded for each member of the household up to 18 years.

The terms and conditions governing the schemes were examined in 2013 by a review group that included representatives of grant beneficiaries and the local authorities. They considered how the benefits of the grants could be spread as widely as possible and to achieve fairness and value for money in the grants process. Arising from the recommendations of the review group, the income requirements for the schemes were revised in 2014 to bring the criteria in line with the assessment of need for social housing and to focus the grants towards those with the greatest needs. I have no plans to further revise the criteria at this time.

My main focus in respect of these schemes is in seeking to spread their benefits by further increasing the funding. For 2017, funding has been increased by a further 6% to €59.8m overall. Some 8,000 households benefitted under this Scheme in 2016, and with this additional funding, this should increase to 10,000 in 2017. A further increase in funding will be provided in the 2018 allocations.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

20. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost per day of rent supplementation in the private housing sector across all housing assistance schemes (details supplied). [45293/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are currently some 50,000 households having their housing needs met via HAP and RAS, and some 40,000 landlords or agents currently in receipt of HAP and RAS payments. These schemes provide social housing support for households already living in the private rental sector and for households who require long-term assistance with their housing needs, by allowing them to increase their income without the risk of losing their housing support. Under Rent Supplement, these households would lose their housing support payment, therefore putting their housing security at risk.

Rent Supplement continues to be paid by the Department of Social Protection to those who are already in the private rented sector but who, because of a short term change in their circumstances, such as loss of income through unemployment, require a short-term income support to pay their rent. These applicants would not generally require an assessment of housing need and the expectation would be that a return to employment would obviate the need for long-term support. Thus Rent Supplement would return to being a short-term income support, as originally intended. Rent Supplement is a matter for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

My Department does not hold a per day breakdown of the costs of HAP and RAS due to variations in costs related to a variety of factors including contractual agreements, household size, and locations. However, a detailed breakdown of the annual cost of each scheme per year for both RAS and HAP is available on my Department's website. In summary, the average monthly payment to landlords under RAS, across all areas and all household sizes, was just over €700 in 2016. In relation to HAP, the average monthly payment to landlords at end Q2 2017 was just under €690.

Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks

21. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions his Department has implemented to help homeowners affected by the Mica issue; his plans to set up a redress scheme; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45098/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

The panel had the following terms of reference:

(i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those

technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

On 13 June 2017, the report of the Expert Panel was published and included eight recommendations.

My Department has already taken action to implement recommendations 1 and 2, as priorities.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) Technical Committee, established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, held its inaugural meeting on 11 September 2017 and has held several further meetings in recent weeks.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in regard to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowner/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland have provided assurance that they will collaborate with the Department, the NSAI and others on measures to establish such a register.

During July this year, I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties. In addition, and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

22. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his plan to end the use of hotels, bed and breakfasts and similar accommodation for homeless persons; if his targets are being met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45103/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At the end of September 2017, some 690 families were being provided with temporary accommodation in hotel and B&B arrangements in the Dublin Region. This number is down from the total of 871 recorded at the end of March 2017 and must also be considered in the context of the ongoing numbers of families presenting as homeless.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness comprises a range of actions to tackle homelessness and to assist families residing in emergency accommodation. It is evident that the long-term solution to the current homelessness crisis is to increase the supply of new homes, across all forms of housing, to 25,000 per annum by 2020. 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, commencement notices and ESB residential connections all on the increase. With over 19,000 households having had their social housing needs met in 2016, I expect that a further 21,000 such supports will be delivered in 2017.

With regard to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), there are currently more than 28,500 households being supported by the scheme and over 14,500 of these households commenced HAP support since the beginning of 2017; more than 350 households are being set up on HAP each week in 2017.

It is intended that the long-term housing needs of households in emergency accommodation will be met through a range of social housing supports such as the HAP scheme and through general social housing allocations. Progress is being made with over 3,000 sustainable exits from homelessness into independent tenancies being achieved in 2016, while over 2,000 such exits were achieved during the first half of 2017.

In addition to the actions outlined above, housing authorities are delivering custom-developed facilities, referred to as family hubs, which offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability and more coordinated needs assessment and support than is possible in hotel accommodation.

Housing Data

23. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the system of assessing building completions used by his Department; his plans to develop a more accurate system for recording housing and apartment building completions; the position regarding the work of the internal group within his Department tasked with examining housing statistics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45288/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a key objective is to increase the supply of housing to 25,000 homes per annum. As we improve our housing systems and put in place a housing delivery model that is sustainable and responsive to changing economic and societal demands, it is critical that any future policy interventions that become necessary can be identified and planned for in good time, underscoring the importance of quality data that are timely, accurate and informative.

Housing activity data is available from a range of different indicators – planning permissions, construction commencement notices, building insurance registrations and ESB connections to the grid - all of which are tracked and published by my Department on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

ESB connections data have been used in the past by my Department and others as the only consistent long-term proxy for housing output with full coverage i.e. every home is connected to the electricity grid. Acknowledging the limitations of the current ESB data-set, while still being informed by it in particular, my Department no longer uses it as a proxy for new house building activity. I am committed to developing a more robust method of capturing house completions and improving the data that is currently being recorded as they relate to newly constructed homes.

In this context, my Department and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are continuing to work with the ESB to identify and supply to the CSO a more detailed dataset on connections which can be used to estimate the number of new builds. Good progress has been made on this issue, which is technically complex. Once the detailed ESB data is received by the CSO, they will require a period of time to review and analyse it by matching it to other datasets, and to build a methodology for estimating and tracking new builds, based on the best available data. This project is advancing well and all parties are committed to its further progression as quickly as possible.

In addition, my Department has established a Housing Data Analytics Group, with membership from the CSO, ESRI, Central Bank, local authorities and others, to examine this complex area and to monitor and review the various sources of data collected nationally, with the aim

of providing a comprehensive and coherent suite of statistics relating to housing matters. This Group is due to hold its fourth meeting next month.

Land Availability

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he has taken to tackle the problem of land banking and hoarding; if he is satisfied that these steps will be successful in releasing suitable land for building in the short and medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45290/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the context of the current housing supply shortage, the Government recognises the pressing need to ensure that land that is suitable for the development of housing, in urban areas in particular, is not held back by developers. A range of measures are being implemented under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan to ensure that such land is brought forward for development at the earliest opportunity.

The vacant site levy, provided for in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, is designed to incentivise the development of vacant and under-utilised sites in urban areas for housing and regeneration purposes. A 3% levy becomes liable for payment on such lands from January 2018. As announced in Budget 2018, the 3% levy rate which applies in the first year of the vacant site appearing on the register will be increased to 7% in year 2 and subsequent years, resulting in an effective vacant site levy of 10% over the first two years. Any levy outstanding will remain a charge on the land concerned until paid and therefore there will be a cumulative effect associated with not activating a site for development.

Furthermore, in order to address the issue of the hoarding of residentially zoned land, a number of amendments have been tabled in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which is currently at Dáil Report Stage. The amendments proposed are collectively aimed at tightening up existing provisions to ensure that extensions of duration of planning permissions cannot be granted where substantial development work has not been carried out during the initial life of the permission, with a particular focus on housing developments.

In addition, aligned with the Budget announcement, the recently published Finance Bill 2017 provides for a broader housing supply measure through amending the seven-year Capital Gains Tax (CGT) exemption to allow owners of qualifying assets to sell those assets, within a specified period, and still enjoy a full CGT relief. The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform also signalled his intention to introduce a rebate from stamp duty on development land, details of which will be introduced by way of a Committee Stage amendment to the Bill.

Rebuilding Ireland attaches a particular priority to using publicly owned lands for the delivery of housing as quickly as possible, supported by the acceleration in Exchequer-funded social housing and the delivery of more homes for sale and rent at lower and more affordable price points. All local authority housing sites and an initial set of broader State-owned sites have now been mapped and can be accessed at:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

Local authorities and the Housing Agency are now preparing strategic development plans for the prioritised development of these sites.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

25. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when infrastructural funding will be available to open up the proposed development road on the Ardmore Road, Mullingar, County Westmeath, to allow for future construction works. [45252/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was issued to all local authorities in August 2016. It was open to all local authorities to apply for funding towards the capital cost of public infrastructure, which, when provided, would secure the early delivery of additional housing at considerable scale and more affordable price points, with developments in excess of 500 units in the Dublin area, or in excess of 200 units in areas outside Dublin.

21 local authorities submitted a total of 74 proposals. On 28 March 2017, I announced funding for 34 of those projects under LIHAF. The total cost of these projects is €226.5 million, of which €169.7 million is to be funded by the Exchequer, with local authorities funding the remaining €56.8 million. These public infrastructure projects will be key to the delivery of 23,000 housing units over the next four years, with a longer term projection of up to 70,000 units as the selected sites are fully built out.

Westmeath County Council submitted two projects for consideration under LIHAF. Funding was approved for an access road in Brawny Road, Athlone in the amount of €1.83m. However, while Ardmore Road, Mullingar was one of a number of proposals that was assessed as meriting funding, it was not possible to include the project in the March 2017 approvals, within the overall level of funding available.

As part of Budget 2018, I announced an additional €50 million funding which will be available for a second call under LIHAF and which will again be subject to matching funding at 25% by local authorities. This will facilitate more infrastructure to unlock further sites and activate more housing supply. A further call for proposals under LIHAF is likely early in 2018 and it will be open to all local authorities, including Westmeath County Council, to submit new projects or resubmit previous projects, such as the Ardmore Road project in Mullingar, for consideration at that time.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

26. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if greater discretion will be provided to local authorities in regard to the construction of new social housing schemes and to remove unnecessary procedures that are causing delays. [45089/17]

40. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review the level of bureaucracy involved for local authorities to provide final approval for new social housing schemes. [45088/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 40 together.

Social housing projects funded by my Department, like all Government-funded construction projects, must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework

(CWMF), the objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money and financial accountability during all stages of project delivery.

While my Department must comply with the CWMF, it is also determined to ensure speedy delivery of social housing construction projects. Accordingly, my Department has streamlined the nine stages of project review under the CWMF to just four stages. Where project designs and, in particular, costs are consistent, the reviews by my Department are straightforward and completed on a timely basis. This process allows local authorities to forward design proposals and costings to my Department sequentially, as they advance projects through the planning process.

My Department also has regular informal technical dialogue with all local authorities to resolve issues with projects, which allows for projects to be moved from concept to completion, as efficiently as possible. My Department's role in reviewing projects represents a very small proportion only of the time taken in advancing a social housing build project onto site. Furthermore, the time taken for approvals will always depend on the quality and completeness of the initial proposal, the scale and complexity of individual projects and on the avoidance, where possible, of cost escalations in projects.

As well as streamlining the approvals process under the CWMF and enhancing the direct technical dialogue between my Department and the local authorities, under Rebuilding Ireland a review of the project approvals process for social housing has been undertaken; this is available at the following link:

http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social-Housing_Approval-Processes-Procedures-Review-1.pdf

The recommendations of this Review are now being implemented and a working group, comprising representatives of local authorities and my Department, will soon finalise new project approval and development timelines. Additionally, my Department is working with local authorities to encourage greater take-up of the available options under both 'Design and Build contracts' through the Rapid Delivery Framework, set up by the Office of Government Procurement and, for smaller projects (less than 15 units and less than €2m), greater use of the available single-stage approval process, which may suit less complex projects.

Private Rented Accommodation

27. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the workability of the policy proposal in the strategy for the rental sector to move towards tenancies of indefinite duration in the absence of proposals to amend section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Acts to provide for security of tenure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45294/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A number of measures have been introduced in recent years with the objective of moving towards tenancies of indefinite duration and improving security of tenure for tenants.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015, enacted on 4 December 2015, provided that notice periods for the termination of further Part 4 tenancies, i.e. tenancies that extended beyond 4 years, be extended pro rata in line with the length of the tenancy, subject to caps of 224 days for termination by landlords and 112 days for terminations by tenants (previously 112 days for landlords and 56 days for tenants).

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, recognises rapidly increasing rent prices as the most significant challenge to security of tenure in the rental sector at present. Where tenants cannot afford their rents, their tenancies are not secure and evictions for non-payment of rent may ensue.

To address this, the Government introduced the Rent Predictability Measure, which was provided for through the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, introducing the concept of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) to moderate the rate of rent increases in those areas of the country where rents are highest and rising quickly.

The 2016 Act also gave effect to other actions to address tenants' security, including:

- The abolition of a landlord's right, during the first 6 months of a further Part 4 tenancy, to end that tenancy for no stated ground; and

- The extension of the term of Part 4 tenancies from 4 to 6 years.

The so-called 'Tyrrelstown amendment', included in the 2016 Act, already limits the ability of landlords to use the grounds of sale to terminate tenancies, provided for in section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Act. Where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time, that sale will now be subject to the existing tenants remaining in situ, other than in exceptional circumstances.

I have recently announced a series of further measures in relation to the rental sector, including a two-year change plan to develop and strengthen the role of the RTB as a pro-active regulator for the sector. One of the first measures will be for the RTB to provide clear guidance, for both landlords and tenants, on what constitutes the "substantial" refurbishment or renovation which can be cited as a section 34 ground for termination of a tenancy. More generally, the RTB will be given enhanced powers to ensure that section 34 grounds are properly used and that the statutory obligations on landlords who use them are fully met.

Public Private Partnerships Data

28. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the housing PPPs; the timeframe for their delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45104/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing PPP Programme involves an investment with a capital value of €300 million. It is to deliver 1,500 social housing units in total, via three bundles. The first bundle, which comprises six PPP sites, is to provide over 500 units in the Greater Dublin Area. Two of the sites are located in the Dublin City Council area with one each in the County Council areas of South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth.

The second bundle, comprising eight PPP sites which are to provide over 450 units, was announced in June 2016. Three of the sites are located in the Cork County Council area, with one each in the Galway City Council and Waterford City & County Council areas. There is a further one site in each of the County Council areas of Clare, Kildare and Roscommon.

The identification and selection of sites for the third project bundle is currently underway and is expected to be finalised in the coming months.

Each individual bundle of sites takes an estimated 37-48 months to deliver in total, includ-

ing planning, procurement and construction. It is expected that construction would commence in 2018 on the first bundle of sites, with units becoming available from 2019.

Traveller Accommodation

29. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the findings of the independent review of funding for Traveller specific accommodation and the implementation of traveller accommodation programmes; and his plans to address the problems in the delivery of traveller specific accommodation identified in the report. [45347/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to establishing a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities' Traveller Accommodation Plans (TAPs), to consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern and to report on the delivery of safe, culturally appropriate accommodation.

To support the advancement of this commitment, the Housing Agency has undertaken a review of expenditure on, and delivery of, Traveller-specific accommodation, in order to assist and inform the work of the special working group.

The report was finalised and submitted to the National Traveller Accommodation Committee (NTACC) for consideration at its meeting on 28 August 2017. The NTACC is a statutorily appointed Committee, comprising key stakeholders, including Traveller representative groups, to advise the Minister in relation to Traveller accommodation matters. On foot of its considerations of the report, the NTACC agreed to advise me to establish an Expert Group to examine and make recommendations on issues regarding Traveller accommodation policy, strategy and implementation. This is in keeping with the Programme for Partnership Government and I have agreed to proceed with the establishment of this Expert Group.

I have also agreed that a review of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 should be part of the work of the Expert Group. The composition, terms of reference and methodology of this Expert Group are currently being formulated with a view to it being in place as soon as possible.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

30. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to amend the rules of the mortgage to rent scheme in view of the small number of persons who were able to avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45101/17]

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. The Review, available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the 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 has been 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. I am providing an additional €5m for the MTR scheme in 2018, which will support at least 250 additional MTR cases to be completed by Approved Housing Bodies working together with lenders using the existing MTR scheme.

The MTR 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 arrangements 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. A call for Expressions of Interest from bodies interested in pursuing pilot operating models has been initiated by the Housing Agency today. 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.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

31. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the review of income eligibility limits for social housing has commenced; if so, the likely timeframe for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45087/17]

44. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to improve income eligibility limits for social housing in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45086/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I

propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 44 together.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

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

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports has commenced. I would expect the results of this review to be available for publication during 2018.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

32. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to address the social housing waiting list problems for county councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45307/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Funding is provided to local authorities and approved housing bodies under my Department's Social Housing Capital Investment programme and the Social Housing Current Expenditure programme, to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments.

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 delivery of 11,000 new social homes - currently approved and progressing through planning, design and 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/>.

The level of funding provided to the local authorities for their social housing construction activity is directly linked to the scale of delivery they achieve on these projects. Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as projects 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.

In Budget 2018, the total funding provision of €1.9 billion for housing next year is an increase of 46% over 2017 and it will allow us to meet the social housing needs of 25,500 house-

holds. A large element – €1.14 billion – is for the delivery of almost 5,900 social homes through a range of construction (5,000) and acquisition (900) programmes.

The balance of the funding will add additional tenancies – and maintain existing tenancies - through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and long-term leasing. It will also fund other important housing supports and services in relation to homelessness, regeneration and programmes to upgrade existing housing (energy efficiency improvements, adaptation grants, housing for Travellers, pyrite, etc).

An allocation of €301 million (an increase of €149m on 2017) for the HAP scheme next year will enable a further 17,000 households to be accommodated, as well as supporting the 32,000 existing HAP tenancies. Funding of €134 million will support a further 600 new transfers under the RAS scheme, as well as meeting the ongoing cost of the 19,900 households supported under the scheme.

Overall, the 25,500 households' needs that will be met in 2018 through the range of social housing programmes represents an increase of over 4,400 on the level of activity in 2017.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Expenditure

33. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amounts paid by his Department in grants and supports for those operating private or group water schemes in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45097/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department recoups funding under the Rural Water Programme to local authorities who administer the programme on behalf of my Department. This recoupment includes grants for capital works and subsidies as a contribution towards the annual operational cost of the domestic element of group water schemes and grants towards the provision or necessary improvement of individual domestic water supplies (more commonly known as private wells).

The table below sets out the amount recouped under the programme over the period 2011 to 2017 (20 October 2017) as grants and subsidies for group water schemes and grants for individual domestic water supplies. There is no subsidy towards the annual operational cost of the latter.

The amounts in the following table do not include the administration and overhead costs of local authorities in administering the rural water programme (approx. €1.8m per annum) which are also recouped to local authorities by my Department.

Year	Grants paid to Group Water Schemes	Subsidies paid to Group Water Schemes	Grants for Individual Domestic Water Supplies (Private Wells)	Total Amount for Year
2011	€45,378,670	€22,217,841	€2,519,824	€70,116,335
2012	€16,880,318	€23,860,840	€2,133,331	€42,874,489
2013	€12,759,610	€18,652,467	€1,825,999	€33,238,076
2014	€11,083,589	€21,054,754	€2,059,322	€34,197,665
2015	€11,443,319	€18,891,449	€2,200,621	€32,535,389
2016	€10,233,419	€15,153,583	€2,275,019	€27,662,021
2017 (20/10/2017)	€4,296,508	€5,738,192	€1,727,957	€11,762,657

Homeless Persons Data

34. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45285/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department produces reports on a monthly basis capturing details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These official homelessness reports are published on my Department's website and can be accessed at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

As reflected in the latest monthly report, for September 2017, there are 5,250 homeless adults and 3,124 dependents.

Land Availability

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the work of the State lands management group announced in Rebuilding Ireland in July 2016; the number of the 500 homes due to be delivered in 2017 through this scheme that are completed; the number that will be completed in 2018 and 2019; the names of the developers engaged in the building on State land; the land the group has identified to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45289/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The active management of the publicly owned housing land bank is part of a range of actions being progressed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, designed to accelerate and increase housing output. This is complementary to actions already undertaken to streamline the planning process, reform development contributions, and invest some €226 million in enabling infrastructure, through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), to facilitate housing delivery.

On 27 April 2017, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. Details in relation to these sites can be viewed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

As the vast bulk of the land bank is under the control of the housing authorities and given their broader role as planning authorities, they are crucial in operationalising social and affordable housing delivery from their sites. Therefore, in order to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach nationally, I have asked local authorities to prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for housing lands in their ownership with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the most potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term, including mixed-tenure projects, where appropriate.

Importantly, local authorities are working to deliver a major social housing construction programme, encompassing 700 social housing construction projects which will provide some 11,000 new homes. Many of these projects are being advanced on local authority owned lands,

and will produce a substantial quantum of new social housing in 2017 and 2018.

In the first instance, the final development model for each site, including the tenure mix, will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, including its elected members. The procurement and tendering arrangements for the development of its sites is also matter for the local authority, who are required to publicly advertise to procure the services of interested contractors and developers.

The procurement for the development of a number of major local authority sites for mixed-tenure type housing is already underway. For example, South Dublin County Council is working to deliver approximately 900 social and affordable homes at Kilcarbery, Clondalkin on a 70:30 private and social housing proportional basis. In addition, Dublin City Council is advancing plans to redevelop a major site on the former O'Devaney Gardens lands off Infirmary Road. It can deliver nearly 600 homes, with a breakdown of 30% social; 20% affordable purchase; and 50% private. The Housing Agency is also in the process of finalising plans for the development for one of their sites at Enniskerry Road. It is expected that other State-owned sites will be brought forward in the near future.

In terms of broader State and semi-State lands, the CIE-owned Ceannt Station site in the centre of Galway city and lands at Connolly Station, Dublin have both been master planned and brought to market, seeking partners to develop the site for residential/commercial purposes. CIE is also working with my Department and the relevant local authorities regarding other sites in their ownership in Dublin and Limerick. I am also aware that lands owned by Galway Port are in the final stages of being master planned and Coillte are currently in the planning process in respect of land at Galway. Finally, the Department of Education is working with my Department regarding the optimal use of its surplus land bank.

My Department is continuing to work with all local authorities and State bodies to ensure that, where appropriate, housing is delivered from publicly owned sites that are strategically located, serviced and available for development.

Planning Guidelines

36. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on remarks by the chief executive officer of Dublin City Council regarding the use of Dublin's green spaces to be considered for the development of housing; if he has issued guidelines to local authorities with regard to rezoning of public green spaces and amenities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45291/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The zoning of lands for particular uses is a reserved function of the elected members of a planning authority, in accordance with the statutory development plan procedures under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Chapter 4 of the 2007 Development Plans Guidelines issued under section 28 of the Act provides a framework to be used when considering decisions on zoning as part of the development plan process.

I would not support the widespread development of new housing on established parks and open spaces in our cities and urban areas. These amenities are an integral part of the functioning and attractiveness of our communities and they provide a vital resource for sports and recreation activities. The Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Planning Guidelines, issued by my Department in 2009, emphasise the importance of the role of open space in achieving quality residential neighbourhoods, where a wide variety of open space and recre-

ational amenities are provided.

However, in certain limited circumstances, there may be a case for examining the functional and amenity value of certain areas of undeveloped land that may now be inappropriately zoned as open space because of practical factors such as prevalence of anti-social behaviour in areas that suffer from poor passive surveillance. I understand that this was the main issue raised recently by the Chief Executive of Dublin City Council. Such sites may be capable of use for smaller infill housing schemes which enhance local amenities without detriment to established and nearby public open spaces. Such proposals to amend local land use zoning objectives would, in any case, be considered by the elected members of the local authority as to the balance they strike in terms of securing orderly development, housing delivery and provision of local community open space facilities.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

37. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to amend the terms of the incremental purchase scheme and the tenant incremental purchase scheme for local authority houses which were introduced in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45102/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum, have been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year and have been allocated a house under a local authority allocation scheme.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Housing Provision

38. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if instructions can be given to the local authorities to reintroduce the provision of specific isolated housing in rural areas for suitably qualified persons already on local authority housing lists or otherwise qualified; if the development of privately serviced sites can be undertaken in either urban or rural areas by the local authorities as a matter of urgency with the objective of alleviating the increasingly serious housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45255/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Addressing our housing shortage and homelessness crisis is the Government's number one

priority. The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is focused on increasing and accelerating housing delivery, across all tenures. The funding earmarked for the social housing element of the Action Plan was increased from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion in Budget 2018.

With regard to rural housing, it is a matter for each local authority to determine the nature, location and relative priority of individual social housing projects. In submitting proposals for funding to my Department in respect of new social housing projects, local authorities and approved housing bodies may include proposals for single social houses in rural areas, where they have identified and prioritised such need.

Local authorities now have substantial pipelines of new social housing projects, ranging from larger scale developments to smaller scale projects, details of which have been published and are available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/>. I am keen that they advance all of these as soon as possible and have assured them that funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard.

In terms of the development of private sites for housing, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), which is aimed at removing infrastructural blockages that were hindering development on otherwise suitable and strategically located sites will support significant development over the coming years. As the first round of LIHAF was oversubscribed, a second round of LIHAF was announced in Budget 2018, with €50 million being made available to unlock further sites for housing.

In relation to the development of rural areas, the Deputy will be aware that the Action Plan for Rural Development, published on 23 January 2017, by my colleague the Minister for Rural and Community Development, takes a whole-of-Government approach to the economic and social development of rural Ireland and will act as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of rural initiatives across Government Departments and other public bodies.

Housing Provision

39. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for the roll-out of a fully staffed full-time place finder service for those looking for a home; when it will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45300/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme administered by my Department plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. There are currently more than 28,500 households having their housing needs met via HAP and some 20,000 landlords or agents currently in receipt of HAP payments. A weekly average of 350 HAP tenancies have been set up during 2017.

HAP is also an essential component of our suite of homelessness prevention and supports. The Homeless Pilot of the HAP scheme has been operational since February 2015 across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region, and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The focus of this pilot scheme is to transition qualified households from emergency accommodation, including hotels, into private rented tenancies. A Place Finder service, similar to the service available in Dublin, became operational in Cork City Council earlier this year and provides a dedicated resource that operates together with the

established HAP delivery team in the local authority. The Cork Placefinder Service seeks potential properties suitable for households currently identified as homeless by Cork City Council by establishing relationships with local property agents and landlords and liaising with individual households to establish their specific needs; and also supports homeless households in securing the tenancy arrangements which may include assisting with tenancy agreements and arrangements in that context. More than 2,000 formerly homeless households are currently having their housing needs met through this targeted support. On average, 33 homeless households each week in the Dublin region alone are securing rental accommodation as a result of the additional supports available through the dedicated Place Finder Service.

I announced recently that the Place Finder support is to be rolled out nationally providing homeless support staff in each of the 31 local authorities with the tools to target HAP supported rental properties for homeless households, with a particular focus of moving families out of emergency accommodation. This means that every local authority will be able to pay deposits and advance rental payment on behalf of homeless households in order to secure accommodation. The existing Place Finder service in Dublin is also being enhanced, with additional staff to be assigned to provide on the ground support in each of the relevant local authority areas. Arrangements for the provision of these supports are currently being progressed by my Department together with the local authorities and I envisage that the Place Finder service will be operational nationally by end year.

Budget 2018 has seen a doubling of the total allocation for HAP to over €300 million, which will enable an additional 17,000 households to be supported and accommodated in 2018, as well as meeting the 2018 costs of households already supported by the scheme in 2017 and in previous years, as well as supporting the roll-out of the HAP Place Finder Support Service across the country.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of HAP and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 26.

Cabinet Committees

41. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which housing will be managed in view of the ending of the Cabinet committee on housing. [39676/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following the recent streamlining of the Cabinet Committee structures and the establishment of new Committees, the new Cabinet Committee “D” covers a range of policy areas including housing, climate action, infrastructure investment and delivery and the National Planning Framework. This Committee, which is chaired by An Taoiseach, will provide political oversight of the Government’s ambitious agenda to deal with housing and homelessness issues.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness sets out the priority actions that the Government is taking. It is an iterative Plan and has evolved as actions are completed and new measures are added. Since its publication in July 2016, the Government’s attention has been firmly focused on delivery. Implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is being advanced across a number of Departments, under the oversight of the Cabinet Committee and

supporting arrangements involving senior officials of all relevant Departments.

Within my own Department, a group of relevant officials, chaired by the Secretary General, monitors progress on an ongoing basis. Working Group structures under each of the Action Plan's five Pillars have also been put in place. In addition, to ensure broader consultation and engagement with delivery agents and stakeholders, an Oversight Group and a Project Board have been established.

Since taking up office, I have met with all key housing stakeholders to discuss their views on the ongoing implementation of Rebuilding Ireland and further actions being considered as part of the targeted review of the Action Plan, which is now largely concluded. Implementation of the Action Plan, including all new and enhanced actions agreed as part of the current review process, will continue to receive priority attention within my Department, and will be overseen on an ongoing basis by the Cabinet Committee.

Questions Nos. 42 and 43 answered with Question No. 18.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 31.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

45. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the social housing targets for 2018, 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45251/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): To support and accelerate the delivery of social housing as set out in Rebuilding Ireland, the necessary funding is in place, with a greater emphasis now being placed on direct build activity for local authorities and approved housing bodies.

In Budget 2018, I secured €1.9 billion for housing programmes, representing a 46% increase over 2017. This investment will ensure that the housing needs of 25,500 households will be met next year, over 4,400 more than in 2017.

In addition to this significant increase for 2018, I also secured a further €500 million for investment in social housing over the period 2019 – 2021. This additional funding will allow for an increase in the overall level of social housing to be delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies by a further 3,000 homes.

The overall target for social housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland has increased from 47,000 to 50,000 homes, with the total funding investment increasing from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion. The breakdown of this 50,000 target between the main programme areas of build, acquisition and leasing, for each year of Rebuilding Ireland, is set out in the following table.

The Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Schemes are also to contribute significantly towards meeting housing needs over the course of Rebuilding Ireland. The targets for both schemes for each year 2016 to 2021 are also set out in the following table.

Year	Build	Acquisition	Leasing	RAS	HAP
2016	2,260	1,755	225	1,000	12,000
2017	3,200	1,250	600	1,000	15,000
2018	4,969	900	2,000	600	17,000
2019	6,385	1,025	2,130	600	16,760

Year	Build	Acquisition	Leasing	RAS	HAP
2020	7,716	800	2,631	600	13,000
2021	8,907	800	2,450		10,000
	33,437	6,530	10,036	3,800	83,760

Land Availability

46. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if all public land zoned for housing will remain public land into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45305/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is very important that publicly owned land is harnessed in the most effective manner possible to secure the best outcomes for communities and the country as a whole.

With regard to local authority owned lands that are zoned for housing, progression of development proposals for such lands, whether directly or in partnership with other interests, such as Approved Housing Bodies or other housing providers, are matters for the relevant local authority in the first instance in accordance with housing, planning and local government legislation.

More widely, the active management of the publicly owned housing land bank is part of a range of actions being progressed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, designed to accelerate and increase housing output.

On 27 April 2017, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. These sites can be viewed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

In order to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to the development of these lands, all local authorities have been requested to prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for housing lands in their ownership, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites that are already serviced and with the most potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

In the first instance, the final development model for each site, including the tenure mix, will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, including its elected members.

My Department is continuing to work with all local authorities and State bodies to ensure that housing is delivered from appropriately located and publicly owned sites to meet our current and future housing requirements.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

47. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he envisages the affordability requirement of LIHAF funding being delivered across the country and in Dublin in particular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45299/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The primary objective of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to stim-

ulate and accelerate the early supply of housing in urban areas with large demand, by opening up these lands with key enabling public infrastructure that would otherwise not be provided in the short term. The resulting increase in supply on both private and public lands is key to tackling price and affordability as the lack of supply is one of the main factors currently inflating house prices.

As required under the LIHAF scheme's criteria and conditions, local authorities were asked, inter alia, to obtain commitments from housing providers on associated sites in relation to housing delivery timelines and cost reductions. Local authorities were asked to ensure that an agreed cost reduction was included in the agreements on the approved sites to ensure that there is a proportionate dividend for the State's investment in infrastructure.

Local authorities have used a range of mechanisms to meet the affordability commitment, tailored to the individual circumstances of each proposal. In some instances, the local authority itself owns the lands and consequently has a high degree of control in terms of ensuring delivery of a portion of units at affordable prices and on those sites, local authorities will be providing extra social housing over and above the 10% required under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

Where land is owned privately, providers of housing have entered into an undertaking with local authorities where, in recognition of the early delivery of the necessary public infrastructure, those providers have undertaken that housing will be delivered in accordance within an aligned timeframe of construction and with agreed cost reductions to be taken off the market price. This can be an agreed cost reduction across all units or a larger cost reduction across a specified number of units.

I have asked the Dublin local authorities to seek to provide as much affordability as possible on related sites. However, under the criteria originally set out in LIHAF, the expectation is that cost reductions will be delivered to make housing more affordable than would otherwise be the case, as opposed to requiring that housing be priced under a certain ceiling. The cost of building in Dublin is high relative to other parts of the country, driven primarily by high land costs and the viability of private developments would have been affected by any unrealistic ceilings or price capping, whereas the approach being taken is designed to promote supply, while achieving a cost reduction that is proportionate to the investment in public infrastructure and provides a benefit in terms of both the overall market effect of increased supply. In certain cases, the cost reductions will be aggregated and spread over a smaller number of units to deliver a greater cost reduction and, in those cases, those units will be targeted at key societal groups that may be impacted or priced out of the market.

To date, I have signed grant agreements for 22 of the 34 proposals which received preliminary approval and I will shortly publish further details regarding the approved LIHAF projects on my Department's website.

Irish Water Staff

48. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the original service level agreements between local authorities and Irish Water that would have retained the services of local authority waterworks personnel to Irish Water up to 2026 have been amended; if local authority waterworks personnel will be asked to transfer to Irish Water within the next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45286/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Water Services Strategic Plan - A Plan for the Future of Water Services (WSSP), which was published in October 2015, set out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services for 25 years up to 2040. The WSSP committed to the preparation of Business Plans by Irish Water to set out targets for delivery of efficiencies in operational and capital expenditure and performance targets consistent with the delivery of the objectives of the WSSP.

The Irish Water Business Plan - Transforming Water Services in Ireland to 2021 was published in late 2015. It set the priorities for the utility to 2021 and underpins the transformation plan for the water sector to a single utility model. The plan was considered by Government and was approved subject to budgetary and regulatory review. The Water Services Bill 2017 contains provisions for the establishment of a Water Advisory Body (WAB). The WAB is being established to advise on measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water. The body will report on a quarterly basis to an Oireachtas Committee on the performance of Irish Water on the implementation of its business plan.

The Confidence and Supply Arrangement in support of the minority Government has confirmed the retention of Irish Water as a single national utility in public ownership, responsible for the delivery of water and waste water services.

Since 2013, working through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the local authorities, Irish Water has made significant progress in establishing the utility capability, which has included investing over €2 billion in the system to date. Over the past year, significant design phase work has been undertaken on the development of a transformation plan, in line with the Business Plan objectives. Flowing from this, I have been informed by Ervia (which has responsibility for Irish Water), that they consider that the public water system will benefit significantly by greater integration of operations into the single utility. Consequently, the Ervia Board has agreed in principle not to renew the SLAs beyond 2025 when they are due to end, and to move to a full integrated public utility operations model. The Water Services Acts already provide the necessary protections for terms and conditions, and pensions, of local authority staff working under the SLAs in such circumstances. It is the intention of Ervia to work with local authorities to manage this change within the life of the current Business Plan (i.e. by end of 2021).

A process of engagement with local authorities on the proposed next steps on the transformation plan has now commenced. The SLAs between Irish Water and local authorities have not been amended and remain in place until such time as an alternative is agreed.

Traveller Accommodation

49. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if emergency measures will be put in place to properly accommodate Travellers in Spring Lane, County Cork, and other sites that have been storm damaged. [45287/17]

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 also have responsibility for 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.

In relation to any damage incurred by events such as storm Ophelia, it is a matter for each housing authority to assess any damage caused to Traveller-specific accommodation in their area. I understand that Cork City Council are currently liaising with the residents at Spring Lane in this regard. As part of the capital funding supports provided by my Department, funding of 50% is provided to housing authorities for the purchase of 'Emergency Replacement Mobiles'. An emergency in this respect is an unanticipated event, such as storm damage, that would render a caravan/mobile uninhabitable or dangerous to live in. This scheme relates to authorised local authority sites only. Any request from housing authorities for such funding will be urgently considered.

In response to Storm Ophelia, my Department recently issued a reminder to all housing authorities on the availability of this scheme.

Homelessness Strategy

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if each family in family hubs has received a Leap card for the 2017/2018 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43444/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Arising from the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, my Department is funding an initiative to provide homeless families, residing in hotel accommodation and family hubs in the Dublin Region, with access to free public transport for essential school journeys.

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive is overseeing implementation of this initiative and, working in partnership the National Transport Authority, has put arrangements in place for the provision of such leap cards to homeless families under this initiative. Given that the Leap cards have an inbuilt value-limit, the cards are being made available to homeless families on an ongoing basis throughout the academic year, via Focus Ireland's State-funded Family Homelessness Action Teams.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

51. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the lack of affordable housing being supplied; if the affordable housing scheme which was abolished in 2011 will be reintroduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45292/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 618 of 17 October 2017, which sets out the position in this matter.

Septic Tank Grants

52. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the low take-up of the domestic septic tank grant; and his plans for broadening the qualifying criteria for the grant. [45232/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, brought into operation a grant scheme to assist with the cost of remediation of septic tanks and domestic waste water treatment systems which are deemed, following inspection under the Environmental Protection Agency's National Inspection Plan, to require repair or upgrading. The grant scheme ensures that the limited financial resources available are targeted towards householders, particularly those on lower incomes, who incur expenditure directly as a result of the implementation of the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012.

The Regulations provide that, subject to the applicant meeting all qualification criteria, a local authority may pay a grant to a person who is required, following an inspection, to undertake repairs or upgrades to, or replacement of, a septic tank or other domestic waste water treatment system. Full details of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, are set out in the explanatory leaflet and application form published on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/domestic-waste-water-systemsseptic-tanks/domestic-waste-water-treatment-0.

Householders who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the grant under the aforementioned Regulations and who wish to remediate or upgrade their on-site treatment systems may qualify for relief under the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) Scheme introduced pursuant to Section 5 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013. The HRI Scheme covers main residence repairs, renovations and improvements, including the repair or replacement of septic tanks. The Scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and full details are published on the Revenue Commissioners' website at www.revenue.ie.

Applications for grant aid in respect of remediation works are submitted to, and processed by, the local authorities who then seek recoupment of the amounts paid from my Department. Details of the grant amounts recouped by my Department to local authorities since the scheme was introduced in 2013 are published on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/dwwts_grants_paid_2014-2017_1.pdf.

While it is not proposed to make any changes to the grant scheme at this time, my Department will shortly commence a review to quantify what additional investment is required to equalise treatment between those using public water services and those who do not (i.e those in group water schemes, with private wells and using septic tanks) as recommended by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services. This will include engagement with the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and other stakeholders.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 13.

Approved Housing Bodies

54. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that AHBs have secured sites and funding to enable them to meet their revised new build targets for 2018 to 2021. [45345/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government has put in place the funding required to accelerate the delivery of social housing across all local authority areas. In Budget 2018, I secured €1.9 billion for housing programmes, a 46% increase over 2017. This investment will ensure that over 25,000 households will have

their housing needs met next year.

In addition to the significant increase in funding for 2018, I also secured a further €500m for investment in social housing in 2019-2021. The investment secured will allow for an increase in the overall level of social housing to be delivered by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) under Rebuilding Ireland by a further 3,000 homes, increasing the overall target for social housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland from 47,000 homes to 50,000, with the total funding envelope increasing from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion.

AHBs are tasked with making a significant contribution to the overall delivery of social housing in the years ahead, through a range of delivery mechanisms and funding programmes provided through local authorities and my Department, including the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) and the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF). As it stands, roughly one third of the new supply of social housing is predicted to be developed by AHBs in the period to 2021. Joint working and collaboration at local level between local authorities and AHBs is critical to achieving this ambition. There are already a number of mechanisms in place to assist AHBs to realise their potential and deliver on their commitments including the recent establishment by the Housing Agency of a dedicated AHB Services Unit.

My Department continues to support and work with local authorities to develop their major housing development sites. At this point, all the sites have been mapped on the Rebuilding Ireland website, and all local authorities are in the process of finalising and submitting strategic development plans for their respective land bank for review and further consideration. It is expected that opportunities for additional AHB partnerships will be identified as part of this process.

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 construction schemes right across the country delivering 11,000 new social homes - currently approved and progressing through planning, design, construction. The report, which can be accessed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>

This includes details of projects involving more than 4,500 new social houses to be delivered by AHBs.

In terms of access to land to underpin further delivery, clear engagement will be required between local authorities and AHBs in order to ensure that opportunities are taken to match available public lands with AHBs having capacity to bring forward projects. Local authorities are currently finalising management plans for the housing lands in their ownership, providing the vehicle for ensuring that such opportunities are realised. In addition, AHBs can continue to pursue projects through turnkey arrangements on private lands.

Nitrates Usage

55. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason farmers in Northern Ireland can spread slurry for the entire year depending on ground conditions and weather in view of the fact that the entire island has similar land and weather conditions; the reason farmers here do not have the same conditions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45090/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

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 Nitrates Directive requires all member states to define set periods when the land application of fertiliser, including slurry, is not allowed and in Ireland the closed season commenced on 15 October.

The closed periods in Ireland were decided following extensive consultation and were discussed with farming bodies and the European Commission when Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme was introduced. The provisions of the Regulations are underpinned by scientific research and good agricultural practice. The most recent scientific studies carried out on a diverse range of farm and soil types as part of the on-going Agricultural Catchments Programme run by Teagasc 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.

Ireland is currently negotiating a new NAP with the European Commission and, while we are now at a critical juncture in those negotiations, I am hopeful of a positive outcome. Each member state's negotiations with the Commission take account of the particular circumstances in the individual member state and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the details of the Nitrates Action Programme in Northern Ireland or in any other member state.

IDA Ireland Data

56. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of reports that the IDA has commissioned an analysis into advance planning permission for future data centres; the name of the company commissioned for this task; the cost involved; when this report will be published; and if IDA vacant sites are being examined for possible use. [45590/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Earlier this year, IDA Ireland sought submissions from suitable service providers to undertake a study to identify potential strategic land banks in Ireland that would be suitable to accommodate the sustainable development of large scale Data Centre projects. Following this process Jacobs Engineering, supporting by AOS Planning, were appointed to produce this report.

The study, which will assist efforts to ensure that Ireland continues to be best placed to compete for, win and sustain data centre investments, is now approaching its final stages. The study will evaluate viable property options nationally that are both supported by the necessary infrastructure and able to meet the complex and evolving needs of data centre investments.

The study is for internal IDA Ireland purposes and is not intended for publication. Details on its cost have not been made publically available as they are commercially sensitive and could impact other tendering processes.

Over recent years, leading international technology and computing companies have announced significant data centre investments for Ireland and the IDA is committed to ensuring that this trend continues. The Agency, supported by other relevant key stakeholders, will continue to highlight credible and flexible property solutions that form part of the competitive value

proposition for this sector.

State Aid

57. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of the development of a longer term business development loan scheme which would assist firms in long term investing for a post-Brexit environment. [45592/17]

58. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a formal request was made to change State ceilings for grant aid to enterprises over a three year period further to her confirmation that in autumn 2016, officials from her Department initiated discussions with the Directorate General for Competition to sensitise the commission to potential difficulties likely to be encountered by firms relating to Brexit. [45593/17]

59. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the rescue and restructure scheme will comply with State ceilings for grant aid to enterprises made over a three year period following her confirmation that her Department recently filed the scheme for approval under state aid rules with the EU Commission; and the direct exchequer funding that will be allocated to the scheme. [45594/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 to 59, inclusive, together.

In our engagements with both EU Commissioners and Ministers from other Member States since the UK decision, Brexit has been a central part of the discussions at these meetings. Officials of my Department have held discussions with DG Competition on the potential difficulties likely to be encountered by Irish firms from the Brexit referendum result, with the most recent meeting taking place this week. I also informed Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, of these issues when I met him in Brussels on 10th July 2017. These discussions will continue at the highest levels to address all relevant issues relating to any proposals emerging from our work with industry.

I recently announced a Brexit Loan Scheme, which will provide affordable working capital financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or will be in the future. The new Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The new Brexit Loan Scheme aims to make up to €300 million available to SMEs and Small Mid-Caps. The scheme will be open both to State Agency clients and those businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies.

The total cost to the exchequer will be €23 million. My Department will contribute €14 million, the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will contribute €9 million. SBCI will use this budget to leverage the overall fund of up to €300 million.

My Department is also scoping the development of a longer-term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in long term investing for a post-Brexit environment.

The State aid implications of the potential longer term are being worked through. It is anticipated that this Scheme would be provided under General Block Exemption Regulation rules, meaning My Department could bring the scheme into place without prior notification to the Commission.

Further details of this scoping exercise will issue in due course.

A lot that can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. We are confident that the measures currently in development will be State Aid compliant, and we are taking steps to ensure that we can use all options available under the State aid framework to provide support to companies impacted by Brexit.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance this with the EU Commission.

Workplace Relations Services Data

60. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections carried out by the workplace relations bodies on a county basis in each month in each of the years 2014 to 2015 and to date in 2017; the number of prosecutions undertaken in each county during that time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45595/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body which was established on 1st October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015. The WRC assumes the roles and functions previously carried out by the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), Equality Tribunal, Labour Relations Commission (LRC), Rights Commissioners Service (RCS), and the first-instance (Complaints and Referrals) functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT).

Inspectors of the WRC carry out inspections of employer records with a view to determining compliance with employment rights legislation. These inspections arise:

in response to complaints received of alleged non-compliance with relevant employment rights legislation;

as part of compliance campaigns which focus on compliance in specific sectors or specific pieces of legislation, or

as routine inspections, which act as a control measure.

The aim is to achieve voluntary compliance with employment law through the provision of education and awareness, inspection of employers' employment records and enforcement where necessary. While every effort is made to secure compliance, some employers either refuse or fail to rectify the breaches identified and/or pay money due to their employees. These cases are referred for prosecution.

Details in relation to the number of inspections and prosecutions undertaken in each county during 2014 to 2016 and to end September 2017 are provided in the tables below (a monthly breakdown of the figures for inspections undertaken is not available).

Inspections:

	2017 (to 30 Sep)	2016	2015	2014
CARLOW	55	36	71	53
CAVAN	61	117	134	137
CLARE	106	129	242	217

Questions - Written Answers

‘	2017 (to 30 Sep)	2016	2015	2014
CORK	148	332	287	304
DONEGAL	123	128	184	153
DUBLIN	959	1,067	977	1,021
GALWAY	236	408	410	420
KERRY	39	96	51	59
KILDARE	101	186	246	316
KILKENNY	66	92	91	158
LAOIS	27	63	85	124
LEITRIM	43	36	24	23
LIMERICK	252	426	347	546
LONGFORD	69	79	76	73
LOUTH	218	177	182	121
MAYO	98	147	154	146
MEATH	83	121	143	120
MONAGHAN	76	69	77	82
OFFALY	124	76	91	57
ROSCOMMON	35	61	72	85
SLIGO	38	47	58	57
TIPPERARY	149	177	241	224
WATERFORD	95	207	166	115
WESTMEATH	116	117	133	153
WEXFORD	85	181	299	337
WICKLOW	159	255	344	490
TOTAL	3,561	4,830	5,185	5,591

Prosecutions:

‘	2017 (to 30 Sep)	2016	2015	2014
CARLOW	2	5	1	3
CAVAN	0	4	2	2
CLARE	2	1	3	1
CORK	5	2	7	1
DONEGAL	4	2	6	1
DUBLIN	7	7	13	24
GALWAY	1	2	5	3
KERRY	2	0	1	0
KILDARE	6	11	9	5
KILKENNY	4	2	5	6
LAOIS	8	6	2	1
LEITRIM	0	0	2	1
LIMERICK	5	2	4	3
LONGFORD	0	0	0	0
LOUTH	1	1	3	1
MAYO	4	0	0	1
MEATH	1	9	1	1
MONAGHAN	6	0	0	1
OFFALY	1	8	15	4
ROSCOMMON	0	1	0	1

	2017 (to 30 Sep)	2016	2015	2014
SLIGO	0	0	2	0
TIPPERARY	6	6	5	6
WATERFORD	2	3	1	1
WESTMEATH	7	1	6	3
WEXFORD	6	5	6	6
WICKLOW	3	7	7	8
TOTAL	83	85	106	84

Brexit Issues

61. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has had discussions at EU level on the need to implement specific measures to assist businesses and enterprise in the Border region that will be adversely affected by Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44668/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In our engagements with both EU Commissioners and Ministers from other Member States since the UK decision, Brexit has been a central part of the discussions at these meetings. Officials of my Department have held discussions with DG Competition on the potential difficulties likely to be encountered by Irish firms from the Brexit referendum result with the most recent meeting taking place this week. I also informed Michael Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, of these issues when I met him in Brussels on 10th July 2017. These discussions will continue at the highest levels to address all relevant issues relating to any proposals emerging from our work with industry.

The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require across all regions of the country, to address challenges arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

On foot of extensive engagement with industry, my Department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses. This work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

I recently announced a Brexit Loan Scheme, which will provide affordable working capital financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or will be in the future. The new Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The new Brexit Loan Scheme aims to make up to €300 million available to SMEs and Small Mid-Caps. The scheme will be open both to State Agency clients and those businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies.

My Department is also scoping the development of a longer-term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in long term investing for a post-Brexit environment. Further details of this scoping exercise will issue in due course.

A lot that can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. We are confident that the measures currently in development will be State Aid compliant, and we are taking steps to

ensure that we can use all options available under the State aid framework to provide support to companies impacted by Brexit.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance this with the EU Commission.

Brexit Issues

62. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions her Department is having with its counterpart in Northern Ireland on the need to implement programmes on a cross-Border basis to assist businesses and enterprise that will be affected adversely by Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44669/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department and its counterpart in Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy, co-fund the cross-border body InterTrade Ireland (ITI). ITI has specific responsibility for developing North-South trade and assisting SMEs, on both sides of the border, to develop their export potential.

Given its mandate, ITI is especially well-placed to help businesses throughout Ireland prepare for and address the specific commercial challenges that Brexit may create for cross-border trade. The body is already providing a range of Brexit-related services to its client companies and will continue to do so in the time ahead. Additional funding has been made available from my Department to support this important work and we continue to keep ITI's requirements under review.

My Department's officials engage regularly with their counterparts from the Department for the Economy regarding funding for ITI and the programmes - whether Brexit-related or otherwise - the body carries out. This engagement is ongoing.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there have been inquiries from prospective investors about a replacement manufacturing industry for a site (details supplied); the way in which the IDA is actively promoting the site to existing customers and potential investors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45376/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As I have made clear, the decision by HP Inc to close its facility in Leixlip was very much regrettable. Although the company continues to operate there, IDA Ireland is nevertheless actively promoting the site to existing clients and potential investors and will continue to do so in the time ahead. This entails engaging with suitable multinational companies - including those currently based in Ireland and others considering situating here - about the possibilities for investment in Leixlip. Given the attractiveness of the HP Inc facility, and its location, I remain hopeful that a new investor will be identified in due course and that further employment opportunities will in turn be created for the people of Kildare and the surrounding region.

While HP Inc's decision is very disappointing, there are over 20 other multinational companies in Kildare that employ more than 10,000 people across a broad range of sectors. IDA Ire-

land continues to work with its client base in the region to both sustain and grow employment further with the aim of increasing job creation by 30%-40% over the lifetime of the Agency's current strategy.

Departmental Schemes

64. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to assist in increasing the viability of the second-hand car market; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45424/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department does not have any role in the introduction of measures to assist in increasing the viability of the second hand car market.

Enterprise Ireland

65. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Enterprise Ireland supported jobs in County Mayo; the number in the Ballina area in each of the years 2014 to 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45563/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Enterprise Ireland supports companies in every county of Ireland to start and scale, innovate and remain competitive on international markets. In addition, with the advent of the network of Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland now plays a critical role in driving and nurturing entrepreneurship all the way from an originating idea at local level, to taking-on global markets.

In January 2017 Enterprise Ireland published its strategy for the period 2017-2020. The strategy was developed in the context of Brexit and despite economic and market uncertainties, Enterprise Ireland's strategic aims are to:

Assist clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 and to sustain the existing record level of jobs;

Grow annual exports by €5bn to €26bn per annum;

Increase the level of spend in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020, thus creating further jobs indirectly in the local economy.

The 5,000 manufacturing and internationally traded services companies that Enterprise Ireland works with are a critical source of existing employment and job creation in every county in Ireland and are spread across a wide range of sectors. In 2016, Enterprise Ireland supported companies employed 201,108 people. Within this, 19,244 new jobs were created resulting in a net gain of 9,117 jobs. 65 per cent of client employment is outside of Dublin. 42.2 per cent of client employment is outside the five counties which are home to the five urban centres (Dublin, Limerick, Galway, Waterford and Cork). The contribution of Enterprise Ireland client companies to the domestic economy is very important, particularly from a regional perspective, as it sustains over 300,000 direct and indirect jobs.

Enterprise Ireland collects employment data by county only and therefore cannot report on employment figures specifically for Ballina.

In 2016, Enterprise Ireland supported companies in Mayo employed 3,856 people. **Table 1** below presents employment at Enterprise Ireland supported companies for the period 2014-2016.

Table 1

County Mayo	2014	2015	2016
Total Job Number	3784	3667	3856
Permanent Full Time Gains	220	139	247
Permanent Full Time Losses	-147	-196	-36
Permanent Full Time Net Change	73	-57	211

(Source: DBEI Annual Employment Survey 2014,2015 and 2016)

IDA Ireland Site Visits

66. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA site visits in each county in quarter 1, 2 and 3 of 2017, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45588/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under its current strategy, IDA Ireland has targeted an increase of 30% to 40% in foreign direct investment (FDI) in every region outside Dublin by 2019. The data available shows that progress is being made towards achieving this goal, with 173 site visits recorded in the first quarter of this year. This is an increase of over 20% on 2016, when 136 visits were recorded for the same period.

While visits by the Agency's client companies are a useful tool in promoting particular locations, the final decision as to where an investment may ultimately be situated is dependent on an array of factors. This includes the suitability of infrastructure and proximity to transport hubs. Another key consideration for IDA Ireland clients in this context is the ready availability of suitable properties. The Agency therefore requires an adequate supply of marketable serviced land and buildings that can be offered to investors. If the Agency did not have such properties available for investment, it would diminish Ireland's ability to win mobile FDI, particularly for the regions

The following table sets out the number of IDA Ireland sponsored site visits to each county over the course of the first six months of 2017. Information on the number of site visits that took place during quarter three of this year will be available at the beginning of November.

County	Q1 2017	Q2 2017
Dublin	82	155
Kildare	2	2
Meath	0	0
Wicklow	1	2
Laois	0	0
Longford	0	6
Offaly	1	1
Westmeath	9	22
Clare	10	17
Limerick	10	17
Tipperary	5	5

County	Q1 2017	Q2 2017
Cavan	0	1
Louth	5	10
Monaghan	1	1
Donegal	1	1
Leitrim	1	2
Sligo	2	8
Carlow	3	4
Kilkenny	2	3
Waterford	3	4
Wexford	1	2
Cork	9	21
Kerry	1	2
Galway	23	34
Mayo	0	2
Roscommon	1	1
Total	173	323

Carbon Tax Implementation

67. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance the status of his Department's study of the impacts of carbon taxes. [45400/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland's carbon tax covers non-ETS emissions arising from the combustion of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, for uses outside electricity generation and heavy industry sector.

In the context of Ireland's commitments under the Paris Agreement and other climate obligations the National Mitigation Plan commits to examine the impact of the carbon tax to inform policy on the tax.

As I announced in the Budget I have asked my officials and the ESRI to carry out a review of carbon tax with a view to bringing forward proposals for Budget 2019. The review will incorporate an examination of the role of the tax in driving changes to behaviour in households and business.

The ESRI are currently in the process of developing an energy model which would enable a deeper analysis of the carbon tax. It is expected that the model will be available to assess the impact and pricing of a carbon tax in the first half of 2018.

Stamp Duty

68. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the value of stamp duty collected at the 2% rate in 2016 related to the sale of working farmland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45421/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that, while a breakdown of the receipts from non-residential property Stamp Duty is not presently available, Revenue is undertaking further analysis on this topic and expects to have more detail available in the coming weeks.

Tax Forms

69. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if an allowance is being made on behalf of accountants who are facing the income tax filing deadline on 14 November 2017 due to loss of ESB supply and broadband in October 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45425/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that in recognition of the difficulties experienced by many households and businesses during recent storms that resulted in significant power outages, Revenue announced yesterday, 25 October, an extension in the online Pay and File deadline to midnight on Thursday 16 November 2017.

A copy of the Press Release is attached for the Deputy's information.

Revenue extends "Pay and File" deadline to 16 November 2017

Revenue is very aware of the difficulties that affected many households and businesses as a result of the recent storms and is conscious that these may have impacted on preparations to meet the upcoming online Pay and File deadline.

In order to assist customers and practitioners impacted by power outages, Revenue has today advised that the deadline to Pay and File online has been extended to midnight on Thursday 16 November 2017.

The ROS and Payment Support helpdesks will be open until 8pm on the nights leading up to the new deadline, and will remain open until midnight on 16 November, to assist with filing returns and making payments right up to the deadline.

The deadline for paper filers is 31 October 2017 and this remains unchanged.

Central Bank of Ireland Data

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the non-payment of water charges by a household will be reflected in the central credit register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45429/17]

71. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the late payment of utility bills by a household will be reflected in the central credit register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45430/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 71 together.

The Central Credit Register is established by the Central Bank under the Credit Reporting Act 2013. Part (e) of the definition of credit as set out in Section 2(1) of the Act excludes from the definition of credit that which is provided 'in connection with the provision of a utility or other service on a continuing basis'. Accordingly the Central Bank advises that information relating to utility bills or water charges will not be collected by the Central Credit Register.

VAT Rate Application

72. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the VAT rate for the

entertainment industry is 23% (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45436/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT Consolidation Act 2010, as amended, provides for the application of the standard rate of VAT, currently 23%, to the supply of the service of a band. The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In general, the VAT Directive provides that all goods and services must be charged to VAT at the standard rate unless they fall within particular categories of goods and services specified in the VAT Directive. VAT rating is determined on the basis of particular goods and services, not by goods or services as a whole.

The 9% reduced VAT rate, which was introduced from 1 July 2011 as part of the Government Jobs Initiative, applies to a number of services including those provided by hairdressers and barbers. This is provided for under Annex III of VAT the Directive. There is no provision that would allow a reduced VAT rate to apply to wedding bands.

There is no legislative basis that would allow private individuals to reclaim VAT in the circumstances outlined. VAT is a tax charged on goods and services by businesses who are registered for VAT but ultimately VAT is paid by the end consumer. VAT-registered businesses who are charging VAT are entitled to claim back VAT on their inputs, but individual persons who are not registered for VAT are not entitled to claim back VAT.

Knowledge Development Box

73. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of firms by size (details supplied) that have applied for the knowledge development box scheme for SMEs since being established in tabular form. [45586/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the Knowledge Development Box (“KDB”) was introduced with effect from 1 January 2016. Information from Corporation Tax returns for 2016, the bulk of which are presently being filed, will be processed, parsed and analysed in the coming months. Further information on the KDB will then be available in late 2017 or early 2018.

Tax Credits

74. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of firms by size (details supplied) that have applied for the research and development tax credit in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [45587/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Research and Development (R&D) Tax Credit is a very important feature of the Irish Corporation Tax system. The central purpose of the R&D tax credit is to encourage companies to undertake high-value added R&D activity in Ireland, thereby supporting jobs and investment here. A review of the R&D Tax Credit was undertaken by my Department prior to Budget 2016. The review concluded that the tax credit provides a reasonable level of additionality and that the rationale for the tax credit is not in question. Firms clearly respond to it by increasing their R&D expenditure.

I am advised by Revenue that information in respect of the annual tax cost of the research and development tax credit for years up to 2015, the latest year available, is at the following link

www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-tax-expendi-

tures.pdf

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the information requested by the Deputy is available up to 2015. The information requested in terms of companies availing of the scheme, and of firm size is as shown in the following table. The number of companies shown below availing of the credit includes companies offsetting their credit against their in-year profits and those with refundable tax credits in the year.

Year	No. of Companies availing of the R&D tax credit	Less than 10 employees	11 to 49 employees	50 to 249 employees	250 or more employees
2010	1172	428	394	252	98
2011	1409	505	497	292	115
2012	1543	549	554	313	127
2013	1576	549	584	326	117
2014	1570	528	563	341	138
2015	1535	502	560	330	143

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

75. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if the new KEEP share options scheme for SMEs has the same threshold for granting share options up a level similar to the UK's enterprise incentives scheme. [45596/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In Budget 2018 I introduced the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) with the objective of supporting SMEs in Ireland in competing with larger enterprises to recruit and retain key employees. Share options can provide key employees with a financial incentive linked to the success of the company and may improve the attractiveness of an SME employment offer.

A restriction is placed at company level which limits the market value of issued but unexercised KEEP share options to €3,000,000. It is my understanding that the UK Enterprise Management Incentive (EMI) scheme, which is similar in nature to the KEEP, specifies that the market value of shares subject to unexercised EMI options granted by a company or group cannot exceed stg £3,000,000.

Vehicle Registration

76. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied) which was furnished to his Department; and if he will address the position as outlined therein. [45599/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that vehicles which are granted relief from VRT and VAT under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 must continue to be used primarily for the transportation of persons with a disability for a minimum period of required use that ranges from 2 to 6 years, depending on the level of adaptations of the vehicle and the corresponding amount of tax relief available. In the event that the vehicle is not so used, the residual VRT and VAT associated with the vehicle must be calculated using the formula specified in regulation 15 of S.I. 353 of 1994 and refunded to Revenue. The regulations do not provide for any exception to this requirement.

Civil Service Staff Data

77. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of civil servants for each service grade who applied to the service wide mobility scheme to date in 2017, under action 15 of the civil service renewal plan in each Department; the geographic location requested to move from; and the geographic location requested to move to, in tabular form. [45372/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the Civil Service Mobility scheme is one of a number of arrangements to be put in place to fulfil the requirements of Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan which calls to ‘Expand career and mobility opportunities for staff across geographic, organisational and sectorial boundaries’.

The scheme will generate an open, fair, transparent and practical system that facilitates effective mobility of staff across the Civil Service in pursuit of development opportunities and relocation while also supporting the needs of the business.

The Mobility scheme is being developed for the Civil Service on a phased basis:

- Phase 1A will be for the general Civil Service grades of CO and EO for mobility between zones (all 46 zones) and within zones (excluding Zone 46 – Dublin). Anticipated launch Q4-2017.

- Phase 1B will be for the general Civil Service grades of CO and EO for mobility within the zone of Dublin. Anticipated launch mid-2018.

- Phase 2 will be for the general Civil Service grades of HEO, AO and AP. Anticipated launch late-2018.

Equivalent Professional and Technical grades are not covered under early phases of the scheme and consideration will be given to mobility for these grades at a later date.

An element of Phase 1A of the Civil Service Mobility scheme was successfully piloted in Wexford Town and Cork City for the general Civil Service grades of CO, SO and EO in February this year for a 3-month period. This phase has now been extended to include all locations and, following the learning from the Pilot, will be launched in the coming weeks.

Details of applications from the Pilot of Phase 1A are attached for your information.

Grade	Location	Organisation	Number
CO	Cork City	CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE	9
CO	Cork City	COURTS SERVICE	2
CO	Cork City	Emp Affairs-Social Protection	31
CO	Cork City	FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE	3
CO	Cork City	Garda Civilians	11
CO	Cork City	JUSTICE, EQUALITY & LAW REFORM	3
CO	Cork City	LEGAL AID BOARD	5
CO	Cork City	REVENUE COMMISSIONERS	9
CO	Wexford Town	Agriculture, Food & Marine	20
CO	Wexford Town	COURTS SERVICE	1
CO	Wexford Town	Comms, Climate Action & Environment	1
CO	Wexford Town	Culture, Heritage & Gaeltacht	4
CO	Wexford Town	EDUCATION & SKILLS	1

Questions - Written Answers

Grade	Location	Organisation	Number
CO	Wexford Town	Emp Affairs-Social Protection	16
CO	Wexford Town	Housing, Planning & Local Govt	1
CO	Wexford Town	LEGAL AID BOARD	1
CO	Wexford Town	REVENUE COMMISSIONERS	4
EO	Cork City	Agriculture, Food & Marine	1
EO	Cork City	CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE	5
EO	Cork City	COURTS SERVICE	3
EO	Cork City	Emp Affairs-Social Protection	9
EO	Cork City	FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE	1
EO	Cork City	Garda Civilians	1
EO	Cork City	JUSTICE, EQUALITY & LAW REFORM	1
EO	Cork City	REVENUE COMMISSIONERS	8
EO	Wexford Town	Agriculture, Food & Marine	12
EO	Wexford Town	Comms, Climate Action & Envir	2
EO	Wexford Town	Culture, Heritage & Gaeltacht	6
EO	Wexford Town	Emp Affairs-Social Protection	5
EO	Wexford Town	Housing, Planning & Local Govt	3
EO	Wexford Town	REVENUE COMMISSIONERS	5
SO	Cork City	CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE	1
SO	Cork City	Emp Affairs-Social Protection	7
SO	Cork City	Garda Civilians	2
SO	Wexford Town	Agriculture, Food & Marine	4
SO	Wexford Town	Emp Affairs-Social Protection	3
SO	Wexford Town	Housing, Planning & Local Govt	1
SO	Wexford Town	REVENUE COMMISSIONERS	1

School Curriculum

78. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of religious instruction in schools in which he is the patron or in which a public body is the patron; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45231/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As Minister for Education and Skills, in accordance with the Education Act 1998, I am currently the Patron of the nine model schools. The nine model schools operate as denominational Catholic or Protestant schools in accordance with the historic traditions that go back to their foundation and the community to be served at the time they were established.

Religious education is one of the seven curricular areas of the Primary Curriculum (1999). Denominational schools are currently required to allocate thirty minutes per day for religious instruction. However, unlike other subject areas, the content of the religious curriculum provided by schools is not set by my Department. The Education Act recognises the rights of the different church authorities to design curricula in religious education and to supervise their teaching and implementation. This means that the content of the religious education programme in a particular primary school is determined by the patron of the school.

Community National Schools (CNS) are multi-denominational schools under the patronage of Education and Training Boards (ETBs). ‘Goodness Me, Goodness You’ (GMGY) is the patron’s programme that underpins the characteristic spirit of CNS schools. GMGY is a common programme suitable for pupils of all faiths and beliefs and none. GMGY is taught in all of the

Community National Schools.

Post Primary ETB and Community Schools are multi-denominational schools and as such are required to provide for religious instruction according to the profile of the students who attend the school. My Department is preparing a circular that will provide guidance to ETB Post Primary schools on the arrangements that should apply in future for students that wish to opt out of religious instruction or worship. I expect the circular to issue later this year and that it will also apply to Post Primary Community Schools in all of which ETBs are co-patrons.

Schools Building Projects Status

79. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when tenders will be invited for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45375/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project at the school referred to by the Deputy is for a new build 24 classroom school including a Special Needs Unit, with an approx. floor area of 4,748M².

The project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning - Detailed Design Stage, which includes applications for all statutory consents, including Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate and also the preparation of tender documentation. Planning Permission for the project was received in August of this year.

Once the Stage 2B submission has been received and reviewed, my Department will then revert to the school with regard to a timeframe for progression to tender.

School Accommodation Provision

80. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board has concluded its examination of options for accommodation for a new school (details supplied) in Maynooth, County Kildare; if not, when it will conclude the examination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45377/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Maynooth Community College opened in 2014 with an Irish-medium Aonad and it was stated that should the Aonad demonstrate sufficient viability after four years from its date of establishment, a Gaelcholáiste would be established, in a partnership patronage model between Kildare and Wicklow ETB and An Foras Pátrúnachta.

As part of the Major School Building Projects announcement in November 2015 and in view of the continued support for an independent Gaelcholáiste, it was confirmed that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019, subject to the continued viability of the Irish-medium Aonad at Maynooth Community College.

Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board is continuing to examine the options for accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy which will involve consideration of the timing and availability of appropriate infrastructure in the area.

My Department will continue to work closely with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation for the establishment of the school.

Schools Building Projects Status

81. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason his officials have not yet communicated with the board of management of a school (details supplied) if the school is to be a new build school project or a refurbishment project; when the position will be clarified; when a design team will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45378/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which she refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the project brief is currently being prepared. This is part of the preparatory work required to facilitate the progression of the project into the architectural planning process and my Department will be in further contact with the school in this regard.

Schools Building Projects Status

82. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has completed the schedule of accommodation requirements for the extension to a school (details supplied); if completed, the details of the accommodation requirements agreed; if not, when the schedule will be completed; when a design team will be appointed for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45379/17]

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.

My Department has commenced the preliminary work, which includes devising the schedule of accommodation and will continue to liaise directly with the school authority in the context of advancing the project through the architectural planning process.

Special Educational Needs Data

83. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the length of time children from four to 18 years of age are waiting for places in ASD units in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45407/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with Special Educational Needs, including 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.

This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE Policy Advice also states that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

Decisions about placement should be based on individual needs and take into account a number of factors including parental wishes, availability of evidence-based treatments and well-trained staff and individual factors such as targets for intervention and management of behaviours.

There is therefore not one preferred educational environment for children with ASD, rather there is a model which takes into account the assessed educational needs of individual pupils.

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

- 63% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 11% to attend special schools.

Students enrolling in ASD Special Classes must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that:

- S/he has ASD
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

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

The NCSE continues to establish additional special classes to support children with Special Educational Needs including Autism as required. Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,302 for the 2017/18 school year. 1,042 of these are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes of which 151 are being newly established for this school year.

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

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in a child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in the Counties to which the Deputy has referred are available on www.ncse.ie in county order, and with new classes identified.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools.

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.

School Accommodation Provision

84. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied) will be granted. [45423/17]

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

Apprenticeship Data

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of construction-related apprenticeships registered in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017, by apprenticeship type and numbers in a specific apprenticeship scheme, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45426/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

We are now seeing strong growth in registrations in construction apprenticeships with 2017 registrations likely to be close to 3,000. This is against a backdrop of a near total collapse in construction apprenticeship registrations during the crisis. Registrations fell from 5,208 in 2007 to only 650 in 2010. The current growth in registrations, which is forecast to continue to 2020, offers excellent opportunities for young people to build careers and is a critical component of skills supply to a growing sector.

Apprentice Registrations(Construction Related Crafts)

-	Dec-14	Dec-15	Dec-16	Sep-17
	YTD	YTD	YTD	YTD
CONSTRUCTION Related Crafts				
Brick & Stonelaying	20	26	52	40

-	Dec-14	Dec-15	Dec-16	Sep-17
	YTD	YTD	YTD	YTD
Carpentry & Joinery	185	291	399	301
Construction Plant Fitting	56	77	59	68
Electrical	845	956	1343	1,221
Electronic Security Systems	16	28	28	56
Painting & Decorating	11	19	27	33
Plastering	9	7	18	27
Plumbing	318	289	345	397
Total	1460	1693	2271	2,143

Oireachtas Joint Committee Recommendations

86. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the recommendations of the all-party committee will be implemented to allow all full time low-income QQI degree students receive their SUSI entitlement and to allow them access to the HEA student hardship fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45428/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I welcome the publication of this report by the Joint Committee on Education and Skills which examines the eligibility of maintenance grants to students in private colleges.

Under my Department's student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution as defined in the scheme. The definition of an approved institution is set out in Section 7 of the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulation 3 of the Student Support Regulations 2016. The Joint Committee's report is currently being considered by officials in my Department, in the context of overall budgetary constraints, and the large number of competing demands on available funding.

The issue of the future funding of student supports has been raised in the wider context of the Cassell's Report which has proposed a series of options for a sustainable funding model for third level. The report is being considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills in order to build political consensus on the most appropriate future funding model. The Committee is finalising its deliberations and is due to report to the Minister for Education and Skills in the near future.

Departmental Funding

87. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the formal role his Department has with an organisation (details supplied); if public funds are provided to it; the organisation through which it is provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45437/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The organisation referred to by the Deputy is recognised in statute as the body which collectively represents a number of statutory bodies under my Department's remit. Similar to the funding provided by my Department to school management bodies, an annual grant of €168,650 is provided to this body as a contribution towards the annual general running costs of carrying out its core business. The Department also supports a number of posts based within the body for the purpose of supporting Departmental priorities such as driving the reform programme and the Further Education and Training strategy for the sector.

These supports are provided in accordance with the Department's service level agreement with the body concerned.

School Transport Eligibility

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 121 of 10 October 2017, if a medical card will cover payment for concessionary school transport offered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45441/17]

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.

Only children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge.

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

School Transport Administration

89. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Bus Éireann will consider changing the existing pick-up point at Inch Church car park of students from Annascaul, County Kerry, that are attending a school (details supplied) to Annascaul village as requested by parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45444/17]

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Bus Éireann has advised that the children in question are not eligible for school transport as they are not attending their nearest school.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge.

Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes routes will not be extended or altered to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

Accordingly, the request to change the existing pick up point cannot be considered as the children in question are not eligible for school transport.

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

School Accommodation Provision

90. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that its pupil numbers are rising and it urgently needs funds to expand and accommodate these rising numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45456/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department recently approved the provision of permanent mainstream classroom accommodation at the school to which he refers, to replace prefabricated accommodation in poor condition.

The school subsequently submitted options to my Department to deliver additional specialist accommodation together with the replacement classroom accommodation previously approved. The school's proposal and accommodation requirements are currently being considered and my Department will be in further contact with the school on the matter in the near future.

Capitation Grants

91. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding for transition year will be increased in view of the fact that more pupils are opting to partake in transition year (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45457/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Transition Year grant is paid on a per capita basis – therefore it increases/decreases in line with actual participants. The rate is €95 per annum per student. Capitation grants are paid to schools on the basis of enrolment regardless of what year the student is enrolled in.

The amount of funding provided by my Department for transition year has risen from €3.1m in 2014 to €3.6m this year.

Garda Vetting

92. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review the system of Garda vetting of special needs assistants to allow for one garda vetting disclosure to be sufficient for all schools and for this to be renewed biannually; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45458/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2016, the Minister for Justice and Equality commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act) which put in place statutory requirements for the Garda vetting of persons involved in working with children and vulnerable persons.

The Vetting Act applies not just to schools but to any relevant organisation that employs, contracts, permits or places a person in relevant work with children or vulnerable persons.

The vetting legislation and the vetting procedures operated by the National Vetting Bureau fall within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. However, when the statutory vetting requirements were commenced my Department issued circular 0031/2016 which set out the statutory vetting requirements applicable to schools along with the practical arrangements in place to support the vetting procedures.

The circular outlines that the Vetting Act allows for some limited exemptions to the requirement under Section 12(1) of the Act to obtain a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau prior to commencing an employment, including in certain circumstances in the case of persons such as SNAs undertaking recurring substitute employment in a particular school.

A Frequently Asked Questions document was also published by my Department to assist schools with queries in respect of the circular.

Cóiríocht Scoile

93. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a cheadófar maoiniú le síneadh a chur le scoil (sonraí tugtha), a bhfuil fíorghá leis; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [45471/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Féadaim a dheimhniú gur chuir an scoil dár thagair an Teachta Dála iarratas faoi bhráid mo Roinne maidir le cóiríocht bhreise. Tá eolas breise iarrtha ag mo Roinn ar an scoil chomh maith le soiléiriú ar eolas a cuireadh ar fáil ina n-iarratas. Nuair a gheofar an t-eolas seo, is féidir an t-iarratas a mheas a thuilleadh agus cuirfear an cinneadh in iúl don scoil.

Broadband Service Provision

94. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether families and children living in rural areas are becoming increasingly disadvantaged in their education due to lack of high-speed or fibre broadband; if he has raised this matter with relevant Cabinet colleagues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45510/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that Broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and local infrastructure, and thus impact on the service that can be provided. The policy of my Department is to offer the best

quality connectivity to all schools in line with the technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints.

Under the current broadband access Programme my Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, in line with contractual and budgetary requirements. All post primary schools have broadband speeds of 100Mbps or more. In relation to the primary school sector, significant improvement has been made in recent years with the number of primary schools with speeds of greater than 30mbs increasing from less than 100 in 2012 to over 1000 by the end of 2017.

The need to further improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and 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 and my Department and in the context of the National Broadband Plan and the Intervention Strategy, and proposed industry provision.

As the deputy is aware the National Broadband Plan is a Government wide initiative to deliver high speed broadband services to all businesses and households across Ireland. Under the National Broadband Plan, the government has committed to intervening to ensure high speed broadband is available in parts of the country where commercial providers alone will not provide the essential services. This commitment to intervene will ensure that no school is left behind.

Special Educational Needs Staff

95. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that the allocation of special needs assistants is done in a timely manner to facilitate school planning; the actions undertaken by his Department in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45511/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In July last, when I announced that an additional 975 SNAs would be available for allocation to schools between September and December this year, I recognised that we needed a better system of SNA allocations for future years.

I said at that time that I hoped to have a more robust system where we would use the National Council for Special Education prediction models to inform the annual estimates process to enable budgetary provision to be made for the following year.

As a Government we have managed to achieve that. As part of the package of education measures in the recent Budget 2018, I announced that almost 1,100 additional SNA posts will be available for allocation to schools in 2018, over 960 of which will be available for allocation from September 2018.

Making that decision now will facilitate earlier allocations of SNAs to schools for the coming year once the application process for the 2018/2019 school year has been undertaken and concluded by the National Council for Special Education.

Teacher Training Provision

96. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to ensure that all art teachers are trained in both the new junior certificate visual art course and the new leaving certificate coursework; the reason no guidelines have been issued to schools on a new marking scheme; the reason for the delay in issuing exam papers to schools that were posted online on 2 October 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45513/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) is the Department service supporting schools in their implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle through the provision of appropriate high quality continuing professional development (CPD) for school leaders and teachers, and the provision of effective teaching and learning resources.

All schools have been asked to register their teachers with JCT in order to facilitate the delivery of Junior Cycle CPD. In the case of visual art, 1,347 teachers have now registered and 424 have to date attended a CPD workshop for visual art. It is intended that all teachers of Junior Cycle Visual Art will receive a full day facilitated subject workshop in 2017/18. Art teachers will also be supported by ongoing online resources and live webinars.

In relation to CPD for teachers of Leaving Certificate Art, the Professional Development Service for Teachers provided a programme of support for teachers of Art prior to the introduction of the revised assessment arrangements for the subject.

The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this, I have forwarded your questions on the operational aspects of the examinations to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Commencement of Legislation

97. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to commence section 10 of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004. [45515/17]

98. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide special needs education co-ordinator power to designate a secondary school place for a person with special educational needs. [45516/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the issue of the providing power to the National Council for Special Education, as envisaged under Section 10 of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act, to designate a school place for a person with special educational needs, is currently being considered in the context of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 is an important piece of legislation which strives to create a new more parent-friendly, equitable and consistent approach to how school admissions policy operates for the almost 4,000 primary and post-primary schools in this country.

The Bill will:

oblige all schools to admit pupils where there are available places. It is important to note

that 80% of schools are not oversubscribed;

include a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction;

prohibit the charging of fees or seeking payment or contributions for an application for admission to a school or for the enrolment or continued enrolment of a student in a school;

allow the NCSE and the Child and Family Agency to designate a place for a child in a school;

provide for schools to explicitly state in the school's admission policy that it will not discriminate against an applicant for admission on the grounds of disability, special educational needs, sexual orientation, family status, membership of the traveller community, race, civil status, gender or religion while including provision for single sex schools and denominational schools to reflect, in their admission policy, the exemptions applicable to such schools under equality legislation.

The Bill provides an over-arching framework for greater transparency and consistency in school enrolment generally and thereby gives greater confidence to parents that the admission criteria laid down by schools and the procedures used by them are legitimate, reasonable and fair.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 was published on 6th July 2016. The Bill passed committee stage on 28th June 2017 and is due to progress to report stage shortly.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

99. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his powers with regard to a child with disabilities, particularly in cases in which mobility is limited, to ensure that the child has a place in a school location suited to their needs. [45517/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools which have enrolled students with special educational needs, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is a separate independent statutory agency, is responsible through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for planning and coordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs. Each SENO works in an assigned local area with parents, schools, teachers, psychologists, health professionals and other staff who are involved in the provision of services in that area for children with special educational needs.

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

The enrolment of a child to a school, however, is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools. Parents are advised to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to their school/s of their choice as early as possible.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment

policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of this Department.

Education and Training Boards Staff

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the chief executive officer of a training board (details supplied) is retiring early; if it was necessary to sanction it at Department level; the level this is sanctioned at; the arrangements being put in place for a replacement chief executive officer; the estimated timeframe for the recruitment process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45518/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is aware that the chief executive of the training board intends to retire at the end of December 2017, in line with normal retirement arrangements for which Departmental approval is not required.

The manner for filling this vacancy is by way of open competition conducted by the Public Appointments Service. It is not possible at this stage to estimate the timeframe for such a recruitment process.

Schools Building Projects Status

101. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposed timeframe for development of a new school (details supplied) in County Wexford once the tender process is closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45523/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In July 2017 the Stage 2b (Detailed Design) for this project was approved, pending the completion of the process to carry out a short-listing of suitably qualified building contractors and sub-contractors. The relevant short-listing contract notices were posted to the Official Journal of the European Community (OJEU) and the Government's E-tenders website on 27th September and 8th October respectively.

My Department anticipates that, following the tender process to appoint a Building Contractor, this project will go on site and commence construction in the first half of 2018.

Technological Universities

102. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to use national capital investment to create a south eastern university drawing upon existing institute of technology campuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45524/17]

107. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the upcoming

national capital investment projects at institutes of technology will examine creating a south eastern university using Carlow, Wexford and Waterford campuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45556/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 102 and 107 together.

The Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) consortium comprises of WIT and IT Carlow. There is a commitment from the leadership in both institutions to make a joint submission for a Technological University of the South-East region. To date the HEA has provided the TUSE consortium with €0.57m for TU project development. The HEA has made a 2017 call seeking submissions for funding from consortia earlier this month. Some €6m in funding is available in this call including €4m which was ring-fenced for the development of technological universities in Budget 2017. Additional funding for the development of technological universities has also been secured in Budget 2018

I announced on 16 October a significant capital investment programme in Institutes of Technology, to be delivered by Public Private Partnership (PPP). I am pleased that major new buildings in both WIT and IT Carlow will be included as part of this Programme. The WIT proposal relates to the construction of a new engineering, computing and general teaching building. The IT Carlow proposal relates to the construction of a new science building. Both projects will be the subject of ongoing technical appraisal and economic analysis to ensure value for money is achieved.

I am confident that these new buildings will greatly enhance the physical infrastructure available to the Institutions in areas of key skills needs, and will support their joint bid for Technological University designation.

My Department is also supportive of the proposed acquisition by IT Carlow of a site in Wexford for development of a new purpose-built campus. Funding has been allocated to enable IT Carlow to acquire this site.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

103. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which implementation of the national guidelines on promoting positive mental health and suicide prevention in post-primary schools will be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45525/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department of Education and Skills supports a comprehensive and whole-school approach in schools to well-being promotion and positive mental health focusing on the entire school community, as well as groups and individual young people with identified need. This spans the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care, guidance counselling and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves accessing other supports such as educational psychology services. Additionally, schools engage in a wide range of sport and cultural activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth. The whole staff shares responsibility for general student well-being.

The Well-being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) provides a framework for schools to present in an integrated way the existing elements of good practice to promote social and emotional learning, and mental health

and direct them to new practices as appropriate. They provide clear information for schools and for agencies supporting schools on how to address issues of social and emotional learning. The Guidelines outline how schools support young people through early intervention and prevention, modelled on the NEPS Continuum of Support tiered approach.

The key messages in the Guidelines are that:

- Schools play a vital role in providing a protective environment for young people which can counter risk factors.
- Having a whole school approach which fosters important links with the wider school community, and agencies which support schools, is key to successful implementation of the Guidelines

The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including through the systematic implementation of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the whole-school guidance plan, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support model and the HSE, Health Promoting Schools Process. Information is also provided on how to access support from the DES support services and other external agencies and support services.

As stated the Guidelines form a framework within which a broad range of existing processes and practices can be rationalised within schools. Support for the school community in this regard is provided by a number of sources within my Department including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT).

Within my Department's Action Plan for Education in 2016/19 mental health and well-being is afforded a high priority and is one of the key goals. The actions relating to well-being and mental health include supporting schools to implement the national Well-being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) through:

- Introduction of a well-being programme at Junior Cycle: Guidelines on Well-being in Junior Cycle have been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to support the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015. Introduction of the well-being guidelines to post primary schools was initiated in September 2017.

- Increasing the capacity of NEPS : an enhanced educational psychological service to schools, through the appointment of an additional 10 educational psychologists. The focus of this additional support, in the context of post-primary schools, is on extending the delivery of training to teachers in DEIS schools in the Friends programmes. This programme, when delivered by trained teachers, reduces anxiety and promotes coping, resilience and school-connectedness in children and young people.

In addition psychologists provide support to schools in implementing Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014) and Responding to Critical incidents Guidelines and Resource Materials for schools (2016).

- Enhancing Guidance Counselling Provision at post-primary level: Recent budgets saw improvements in guidance allocation to schools, with Budgets 2016 and 2017 together seeing the allocation of the equivalent of 400 guidance posts, following budget measures in 2012 which removed the ex-quota provision for guidance posts (which amounted to some 600 posts). The 400 guidance posts which have now been restored will be allocated separately and transparently and once again

A Well-being Steering Committee, within my Department, continues to examine issues in relation to the co-ordination and aligning of the range of supports provided to both primary and post-primary schools in regard to well-being and mental health promotion.

Finding new ways of tackling policy issues that are not the sole responsibility of any one Government Department or Agency has been prioritised by Government. Youth mental health and suicide prevention is one of three Pathfinder projects under Action 5 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (2014) and agreed by the Civil Service Management Board. This Pathfinder Youth Mental Health Project is an initiative to innovate and improve whole-of-Government working on cross-cutting policy issues and improve the delivery of shared whole-of-Government projects to strengthen the prioritisation, management and accountability of cross-cutting projects that involve multiple Departments, Offices and Agencies and ensure that policies that are not the priority or responsibility of a single body are effectively managed, supported and resourced.

In addition my Department has been involved with the Taskforce on Youth Mental Health as part of the programme for Government and is represented on this Taskforce. One of the challenges of providing a coordinated, streamlined approach to promoting well-being and mental health is of course the fact that there are so many statutory and voluntary agencies/services/NGOs involved. The Task Force was established to produce a series of action focused recommendations to improve youth mental health and well-being. The main areas of focus comprised: emotional literacy and reduction of stigma; awareness of services and supports; accessibility to services and supports across different settings; alignment of services and supports across different providers; and building capacity in local communities. The report has been passed by the Secretary General of the DOH and approved by the Minister. It is intended to submit a memorandum for Government shortly.

Schools Site Acquisitions

104. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has an interest in the site of a school (details supplied); if he envisages future use by his Department for the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45551/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership. However, in common with other buildings of its kind, where significant grant aid is provided by my Department for the development of school premises, investment is secured by way of a long-term legal agreement known as a charging lease. There is a charging lease in place on the property referred to by the Deputy dated 2nd July, 1956 for 99 years, which means I have a vested interest in the property.

In circumstances where a property has ceased to be used as a school, and a request is received to release the State's interest secured under a charging lease, such requests are considered in the context of the specific circumstances which pertain to the individual property. I can confirm that my Department has received a request from the property owners to release my interest in the property. My Department has been in contact with the property owner regarding its future use by Waterford Wexford ETB for educational purposes.

Teacher Training Provision

105. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that in-service training is provided for teachers before the new junior cycle begins (details sup-

plied); if there are issues precluding this training from happening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45552/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service was established in July 2013 by my Department to support schools in implementing the Framework for Junior Cycle.

In general, continuing professional development (CPD) commences for each junior cycle subject the year before the new subject specification is introduced into schools, so that teachers are provided with the resources and supports necessary to ensure that their students have a successful experience with Junior Cycle. Teachers are provided with further CPD in the years following the introduction of the subject specification.

I am not aware of issues that would preclude the delivery of training as communicated to schools. The number of teachers that have now registered with JCT stands at over 31,000 which reflects the fact that teachers in all post primary schools are now in a position to avail of the training and resources offered by JCT. It is intended that all teachers registered with JCT will be offered CPD during the current school year. There is provision within current arrangements to respond to unforeseen events and schools are kept informed in this regard.

A comprehensive programme of CPD will be delivered to teachers during the current school year as follows:

1. Whole-school support and CPD aimed at whole staff in schools.
2. Subject specific CPD in the form of school cluster events. This is where some 6 to 10 schools close to students on the same day and all subject teachers come together in host schools for training purposes. Each cluster this year will involve some 14/15 subject specific CPD workshops
3. Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) CPD workshops are provided for mainstream school teachers via the school cluster CPD events. L2LP CPD is also provided in the special school sector upon request. An L2LP workshop aimed specifically at school leaders was provided in various locations nationwide during Sept 2017.
4. Dedicated CPD workshops are provided in education centres nationwide for school leaders, one in the autumn and one in the spring.
5. JCT has a strong online and social media presence. Live webinars are set to be broadcast across all subject areas in the coming year.

Third Level Data

106. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of full-time and part-time students from County Wexford that attend third level education; the number of full-time and part-time County Wexford undergraduate and postgraduate students at each university or institute of technology; the number of full-time and part-time County Wexford students studying for a postgraduate qualification, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45553/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table.

Wexford student enrolments in 2016/17:

2016/17 Wexford Enrolments: Institute/ Mode	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Total
Athlone IT			
Full-time	2	25	27
Part-time	2	1	3
Athlone IT Total	4	26	30
Cork IT			
Full-time	5	53	58
Part-time	1	8	9
Cork IT Total	6	61	67
Dublin City University			
Full-time	33	560	593
Part-time	18	8	26
Dublin City University Total	51	568	619
Dublin Institute of Technology			
Full-time	12	319	331
Part-time	23	36	59
Dublin Institute of Technology Total	35	355	390
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology			
Full-time	5	100	105
Part-time	2	1	3
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology Total	7	101	108
Dundalk IT			
Full-time		20	20
Part-time	1		1
Dundalk IT Total	1	20	21
Galway-Mayo IT			
Full-time		25	25
Part-time	2		2
Galway-Mayo IT Total	2	25	27
IT Blanchardstown			
Full-time		8	8
Part-time		1	1
IT Blanchardstown Total		9	9
IT Carlow			
Full-time	43	643	686
Part-time	17	402	419
IT Carlow Total	60	1,045	1,105
IT Sligo			

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2016/17 Wexford Enrolments: Institute/ Mode	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Total
Full-time		11	11
IT Sligo Total		11	11
IT Tallaght			
Full-time		13	13
Part-time	1	14	15
IT Tallaght Total	1	27	28
IT Tralee			
Full-time		20	20
IT Tralee Total		20	20
Letterkenny IT			
Full-time		7	7
Part-time		6	6
Letterkenny IT Total		13	13
Limerick IT			
Full-time	2	38	40
Part-time		2	2
Limerick IT Total	2	40	42
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick			
Full-time	2	43	45
Part-time	1		1
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Total	3	43	46
National College of Art and Design			
Full-time	4	22	26
Part-time	2	3	5
National College of Art and Design Total	6	25	31
National University of Ireland, Galway			
Full-time	12	73	85
Part-time	6	9	15
National University of Ireland, Galway Total	18	82	100
National University of Ireland, Maynooth			
Full-time	18	296	314
Part-time	20	21	41
National University of Ireland, Maynooth Total	38	317	355
Royal College of Surgeons			
Full-time	1	14	15
Part-time	8		8
Royal College of Surgeons Total	9	14	23

2016/17 Wexford Enrolments: Institute/ Mode	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Total
St. Angela's College of Home Economics, Sligo			
Full-time	1	10	11
Part-time	5		5
St. Angela's College of Home Economics, Sligo Total	6	10	16
Trinity College Dublin			
Full-time	28	202	230
Part-time	23		23
Trinity College Dublin Total	51	202	253
University College Cork			
Full-time	37	173	210
Part-time	13	48	61
University College Cork Total	50	221	271
University College Dublin			
Full-time	118	635	753
Part-time	64	13	77
University College Dublin Total	182	648	830
University of Limerick			
Full-time	20	193	213
Part-time	2	8	10
University of Limerick Total	22	201	223
Waterford IT			
Full-time	31	890	921
Part-time	62	82	144
Waterford IT Total	93	972	1,065
Total	647	5,056	5,703

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 102.

Schools Building Projects Status

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the proposed new post-primary school on the existing or alternative site in respect of a school (details supplied) is likely to be progressed having particular regard to the urgent and pressing need in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45600/17]

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.

My Department has commenced the preliminary work with a view to progressing the project on the school's existing site and will continue to liaise directly with the school authority in the context of advancing the project through the architectural planning process.

Education and Training Boards Administration

109. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to publish guidelines for ETB, comprehensive and community school students that wish to opt out of religious studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45622/17]

110. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the situation whereby the Catholic church is assisting in the development of opt-out guidelines for ETB students that wish to opt out of religious studies in County Tipperary; his views on whether this collaboration is appropriate for an ETB in view of recent media reports (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45623/17]

111. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the rejection of the claim that State-run second level schools in County Tipperary have a Catholic ethos is in conflict with the assertion by the CEO of the Tipperary ETB that the schools that the ETB administers on behalf of the State have a Catholic ethos; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45624/17]

112. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to examine the practices of ETB schools nationally in order to ensure they do not have a de facto singular religious ethos; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45625/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 to 112, inclusive, together.

My Department is preparing a circular that will provide guidance to ETB Post Primary schools on the arrangements that should apply in future for students that wish to opt out of religious instruction or worship.

ETB schools are multi-denominational schools and as such are required to provide for religious instruction according to the profile of the students who attend the school.

It may have been reasonable when the schools were established for a school to assume that its pupil population was predominately catholic and to make arrangements for religious instruction and worship exclusively on that basis. Historically some ETB schools also made provision for religious instruction required for pupils from local Protestant communities. Depending on their future pupil composition as multi-denominational schools, ETB second level schools may have to make provision for religious instruction for those from other minority religions should it be required.

It is important that schools consult with parents and in the case of pupils who have reached the age of 18, the pupil, to find out what their wishes are in respect of participating in religious instruction and worship. This practice should also apply to the parents of pupils already enrolled in the school and not just those seeking admission for the first time.

Schools engaging with parents, or pupils where appropriate, should at the outset of the school year clearly indicate what arrangements are in place for those who chose not to participate in religious instruction. The outcome of this engagement should be integrated with the school's processes for establishing subject choices generally. Instead of waiting for a parent to

request a withdrawal and then having to make alternative arrangements for the pupil for the class periods concerned, pupils who do not chose religious instruction should be timetabled by the school for alternative subjects.

Societal change with a decrease in religious belief and practice requires change in school practice and the circular will address how those who wish to withdraw must be catered for in future.

It is my intention to issue the circular later this year and that it will also apply to Community Schools in all of which ETBs are co-patrons.

State Examinations

113. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a reader in school: and if this decision will be reconsidered [45627/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. The Commission in this regard operates a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

EU Regulations

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if all EU standards and regulations are required for compliance before the movement of goods and services are permitted across the dividing line in Cyprus for items that originate from the territory not under effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus with respect to the EU's green line regulation in Cyprus; the number of crossing points across the dividing line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45585/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer the Deputy to European Council Regulation (EC) No. 866/2004 as amended, which sets out the terms under which the relevant provisions of EU law apply to the dividing line in Cyprus, between the area under the effective control of the Government of Cyprus in which the *acquis communautaire* applies and the area in which it is suspended. This line is not considered to be an external frontier of the European Union. The treatment of goods arriving from the areas not under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is dealt with under Title III of the Regulation. The recitals to the Regulation explain that "Since the [Green Line between the two parts of Cyprus] does not constitute an external border of the EU, special rules concerning the crossing of goods, services and persons need to be established, the prime responsibility for which belongs to the Republic of Cyprus. As the above-mentioned areas are temporarily outside the customs and fiscal territory of the Community and outside the area of freedom, justice and security, the special rules should secure an equivalent standard of protection of the security of the EU with regard to illegal immigration and threats to public order, and of its economic interests as far as the movement of goods is concerned."

The European Commission reports annually on the operation of the arrangements put in place by the Cypriot authorities. It is of the view that considerable practical obstacles to trade exist. The total annual value of trade in goods is of the order of €4.5m.

The taxation of services is dealt with under Title IV of the Regulation.

There are seven crossing points along the Green Line.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

115. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the recent discussions he has had with the authorities in the United States of America on immigration reform; if he has put forward new proposals with particular reference to the undocumented Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45607/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Irish Government's objectives regarding undocumented Irish citizens in the United States remain constant, namely, to achieve relief for the undocumented and to facilitate greater pathways for legal migration to the United States. With this in mind, Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the U.S. are continuing to systematically avail of all opportunities to raise the immigration issue in their contacts with the US authorities, including the prospects for immigration reform and the situation of the undocumented. We do not, however, underestimate the size of the challenge.

This policy area has been a deeply divisive issue within the US political system for decades, with pronounced disagreement, even within the same political parties, on the best way to deal with a problem which directly affects over 11 million people.

The Government has always tried to work with both parties in a bipartisan way to address our longstanding concerns and this continues to be our approach.

During my visit to New York for the UN General Assembly in September, I met with representatives of the four Irish Immigration Centres in the region and a representative of the US-wide Coalition of Irish Immigration Centres. It gave me the opportunity to hear from those working at the coal-face with the undocumented Irish as to the current situation and the problems they are encountering on the ground.

In addition, I met with a senior State Department official and used that opportunity to once again impress on the US administration the importance which the Irish Government attaches to a resolution of the plight of the undocumented Irish.

I was able to further emphasise the Government's commitment to this issue when I travelled to Washington DC from 3 to 5 October and met with senior members of the US administration and with members of Congress.

I was pleased that Deputy John Deasy, the Government's Special Envoy to the US Congress on the Undocumented, who was appointed by the Taoiseach to that position last June, was able to accompany me to those meetings. His appointment was another important statement of our intent and seriousness on this issue.

In addition, the Taoiseach raised the issue when he spoke with President Trump by phone shortly after taking office and I know that the Taoiseach looks forward to having an opportunity to discuss this important issue with President Trump in more detail in due course.

There can be no doubt, then, that the Government remains wholly committed to working with the US authorities to resolve the plight of the undocumented Irish. The Government will continue to articulate to the US authorities our keen interest in this area while respecting the right of the United States to set its own immigration policies.

I can assure the Deputy of the Government's continued commitment to pursuing these matters on behalf of our affected citizens in the US, and our continued openness to routes and policies that will provide relief for the undocumented.

In addition, our Embassy in Washington DC, and our six Consulates across the US, continue to work continuously with Irish Immigration Centres in order to provide vital services to the undocumented in the United States.

Legal advice on the implications of policy developments for undocumented Irish citizens in the US, funded by my Department, has been disseminated amongst Irish Immigration Centres in the United States and is available online.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

116. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the State plans to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities; the reason for the delay in doing so to date; his views on the difference it will make to the lives of persons living here with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45460/17]

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

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

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

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

The precise timing of ratification now depends on how long it will take for this Bill to prog-

ress through the enactment process and on issues in relation to commencement both of deprivation of liberty provisions, which will be included in the Bill at Committee Stage, and of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

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

Commercial Rates Exemptions

117. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether it is in order that permit holders should not have commercial rates applied to their premises (details supplied). [45597/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 provide for the valuation of all commercial and industrial property for rating purposes. The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his statutory functions and the making of valuations for rating purposes is his sole responsibility. I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in decisions in this regard. Under Irish law there is a distinct separation of function between valuation of rateable property and the levying and collection of commercial rates. The amount of rates payable in any calendar year is a product of the valuation set by the Commissioner, multiplied by the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) decided annually by the elected members of each local authority.

Having a modern valuation base is very important for the levying of commercial rates on a fair and equitable basis across all economic sectors. This has been the policy of successive governments and is the express purpose of the National Revaluation Programme now being rolled out by the Valuation Office. The Valuation Acts provide for revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area so as to reflect changes in value over time due to changes in economic factors such as business turnover, differential movements in property values or other external factors and changes in the local business environment. The Valuation Office is currently engaged in a national revaluation programme, the immediate objective of which is to ensure that the first revaluation of all rating authority areas in over 150 years is conducted across the country, as soon as possible, and on a phased basis. This is a welcome and positive development which is long overdue and on which considerable progress has been made to date.

With regard to property used in the horse training and wider equine industry, I am advised by the Commissioner of Valuation that there has been some apparent confusion in media reports as to the rateability of certain elements of the sector. The Valuation Act 2001 (Schedule 3, Sections 1(a) and (b)) provides that all buildings and lands used or developed for any purpose, are rateable. The basic premise under the Act is that all interests (including buildings) and all developed land are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4 of the Act. I am advised that the only element of the equine sector which satisfies the exemption provisions in Schedule 4 is the breeding of horses. Buildings used for breeding of horses are classified as being of agricultural use and are “farm buildings” as defined in the Act. Therefore, these buildings are exempted from the payment of rates under paragraph 5 of Schedule 4.

On the other hand, buildings used for the training of racehorses, recreational equestrian purposes or livery premises are rateable under the Act because they are considered to be part of a commercial enterprise and are not exempt under the provisions of Schedule 4. Such buildings would typically include stables for horses, covered riding arenas, tack rooms and ancillary buildings used to support the enterprise. It would appear from the details supplied with the Deputy’s question that the activities being carried out in this instance would not be exempt

activities and so the properties in question would be deemed rateable under the Valuation Acts.

While acknowledging the important contribution which the equine sector makes to the economy, there are no plans to reclassify buildings and lands used for training of horses from being rateable to being exempt from rates. To do so would be at variance with the provisions in the Valuation Acts which maintains the long-standing position that property occupied and used for commercial enterprises is liable for rates. Exceptions to this key principle would quickly be followed by demands for similar treatment from the providers of other equally important services, which would be difficult in equity to resist. This could thus substantially reduce local authority revenues, which would have to be made good by imposing corresponding increases on the remaining ratepayers.

Immigration Controls

118. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied that racial profiling is not taking place at immigration controls in the airports and ports; the guidelines that are provided to immigration officers as to the way in which persons are selected for questioning at passport control as against those that are simply waived; if figures or records are kept on the number of persons questioned; if a disproportionate number of those are naturalised immigrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45388/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can assure the Deputy that racial profiling is not a feature of Irish immigration control.

There is no selection of persons at passport control. Every non-national arriving to the State by sea or air is required to present to an immigration officer and is required to produce a valid identity document or passport.

Passenger arriving by air or sea will have some interaction with an immigration officer. Most of these contacts are informal or routine requests to establish the purpose of entry to the State and are not necessary to record. The Deputy will also appreciate that given the volume of passengers arriving in the State (14 million at Dublin Airport in 2016) that it simply is not feasible to record all such interactions.

Immigration Officers operate in accordance with the relevant law. In the case of persons seeking entry to the State who are nationals of an EEA Member State or qualifying dependants, this is set out in Regulations which transpose the EU Freedom of Movement Directives. For non EEA nationals, the provisions of the Immigration Act 2004 relating to permission to enter and be in the State are applied.

In relation to Irish nationals, once an Immigration Officer is satisfied that the person is an Irish citizen that person is of no further interest from an immigration perspective and is free to continue.

A non EEA national who is admitted to the State will have his or her passport endorsed with a permission to enter stamp indicating purpose and duration of stay. A decision to refuse a non EEA national permission to enter the State is recorded and the person concerned provided with a written notice setting out the grounds for the decision.

Immigration officers receive comprehensive training as part of their induction. This includes modules on dealing appropriately and in a culturally sensitive way with passengers and the wider human rights context in which immigration officers carry out their duties.

Domestic Violence Services Funding

119. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding provided by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2017 to organisations supporting victims of domestic violence; the offices within his Department allocated to this funding; and the organisations that were funded from these allocations. [45408/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Details of the funding provided by my Department to organisations supporting victims of domestic violence for the period 2011-2017 to date, as at 13 October, 2017, is appended in Table 1. Please note that the table also includes information on the provision of funding to support domestic violence perpetrator programmes whose work remit incorporates the provision of supports to partners/ex partners of perpetrators.

Domestic Violence Organisation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation to mid October
Adapt (Kerry)	€45,792	€21,500	€22,500	€21,500	€17,200	€22,000	€18,400
Adapt (Limerick)	€44,500	€51,500	€49,000	€44,000	€32,000	€60,000	€61,000
Age Action	€0	€0	€2,000	€0	€0	€0	€0
Akidwa	€1,500	€3,940	€1,500	€0	€0	€0	€0
Amber (Kilkenny) Women's Refuge	€0	€0	€0	€5,000	€4,000	€6,500	€9,000
Amen	€17,200	€21,360	€21,648	€25,000	€30,000	€13,200	€18,800
Ana Liffey Drugs Project	€0	€0	€0	€8,900	€0	€5,000	€0
Aoibhneas Women & Children Refuge	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€9,300
Aonad Family Resource Centre	€3,000	€1,500	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Ascend (Roscrea)	€14,835	€12,900	€13,000	€12,961	€9,169	€10,195	€16,500
Ballyhoura Development Ltd (Kilmallock)	€0	€1,000	€1,180	€1,000	€0	€0	€0
Bray Womens Refuge	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€9,000	€15,000
Carlow Women's Aid	€15,000	€16,750	€15,700	€14,200	€11,360	€19,000	€23,000
Clare Haven Services	€11,000	€10,500	€10,500	€10,500	€8,400	€13,000	€13,000
Cope Galway	€6,871	€2,950	€3,719	€4,000	€1,760	€4,000	€5,500
Cuan Saor Women's Refuge Ltd.	€19,300	€18,500	€20,000	€19,000	€15,200	€20,700	€23,000
Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, Sligo	€15,000	€10,600	€15,105	€10,505	€6,080	€8,500	€11,000

Domestic Violence Organisation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation to mid October
Domestic Violence Response Ltd. Galway	€18,466	€14,750	€18,700	€14,100	€10,800	€14,000	€15,500
Donegal Women's Domestic Violence Service	€21,000	€16,300	€18,300	€16,800	€12,240	€17,000	€17,000
The Donegal Women's network	€750	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Drogheda Women's Refuge	€18,000	€10,500	€10,700	€10,500	€9,500	€10,000	€11,500
Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service	€1,500	€4,500	€5,250	€4,450	€3,200	€7,000	€7,500
Éist Linn		€1,000	€1,000	€0	€0	€0	€0
Esker House	€2,000	€2,000	€0	€0	€0	€0	€13,000
Families, Father & Friends	€0	€2,400	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Family Resource Centre (Inchicore)	€0	€0	€1,500	€0	€0	€0	€5,360
Greystones Family Resource Centre	€0	€0	€2,500	€0	€0	€800	€1,000
Hospital Family Resource Centre	€600	€500	€500	€600	€0	€0	€0
Inclusion Ireland	€0	€0	€0	€5,615	€0	€0	€0
Inner City Organisation Network	€800	€1,000	€1,000	€1,000	€0	€0	€0
Irish College of General Practitioners	€0	€0	€0	€0	€9,470	€8,781	€0
Inishowen Women's Outreach	€5,245	€1,000	€205	€500	€0	€0	€0
Laois Domestic Abuse Service	€18,800	€14,200	€16,950	€12,500	€10,000	€18,000	€22,500
Letterkenny Women's Centre	€0	€4,800	€4,800	€4,800	€3,840	€6,500	€7,500
Lifeline (Inishowen) Domestic Violence Service	€0	€0	€0	€750	€0	€0	€0

Questions - Written Answers

Domestic Violence Organisation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation to mid October
Limerick Local Area Network on Violence Against Women	€1,750	€1,500	€1,550	€1,500	€0	€0	€0
Limerick Women's Network		€270	€210	€0	€0	€0	€0
Longford Women's Link	€20,300	€21,400	€21,200	€18,400	€14,720	€20,000	€21,000
Mayo Women's Support Service	€22,800	€23,900	€24,000	€22,500	€18,000	€8,204	€9,776
Mayo Children's Initiative	€0	€3,500	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Meath Women's Refuge and Support Service	€25,900	€25,000	€27,000	€26,000	€20,800	€30,000	€34,000
Men's Development Network	€10,000	€0	€10,000	€10,000	€10,000	€40,000	€0
Mna Feasa	€29,316	€28,000	€28,000	€25,000	€18,400	€25,000	€27,500
National Traveller Women's Forum	€6,000	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Oasis	€5,000	€7,000	€7,600	€9,300	€7,440	€10,000	€10,000
Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service	€9,600	€9,100	€10,800	€9,100	€6,880	€10,000	€12,000
Open Door Network	€3,000	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Pavee Point	€0	€0	€5,200	€5,250	€0	€0	€0
Ronanstown Community Development Project	€500	€600	€700	€0	€0	€0	€0
Roscommon Safe Link	€18,500	€18,000	€18,300	€16,800	€12,800	€17,000	€18,000
Safe Ireland	€0	€15,000	€39,000	€105,000	€45,000	€5,500	€16,000
Saoirse Housing Association (Tallaght)	€14,500	€12,900	€17,400	€13,000	€10,400	€15,000	€16,000
Sohragi	€1,000	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Sonas Housing	€2,500	€3,000	€0	€0	€0	€14,000	€5,500
Southwest Kerry Women's Association	€500	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Southill Domestic Abuse Project	€1,000	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0

Domestic Violence Organisation	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation	Funding drawn by organisation to mid October
Teermann Housing Association	€14,500	€13,800	€14,800	€13,800	€11,040	€16,000	€17,000
Teermann Domestic Violence Service	€3,500	€2,500	€2,500	€0	€0	€0	€0
Waterford Women's Centre	€1,000	€0	€1,000	€500	€0	€0	€0
West Cork Women Against Violence Project	€0	€2,000	€2,345	€0	€0	€0	€8,000
Wexford Local Area Network against violence Against Women	€2,000	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Westmeath Support Services	€15,000	€14,200	€15,900	€14,200	€11,360	€16,000	€17,000
Women's Aid Dublin	€74,000	€126,500	€120,750	€96,234	€125,320	€94,000	€100,000
Women's Aid Dundalk	€17,500	€16,800	€17,560	€14,000	€14,000	€16,500	€17,500
Womens Therapy Centre	€0	€8,600	€8,600	€2,637	€0	€0	€0
You Are Not Alone (YANA)	€700	€800	€0	€0	€0	€0	€2,400
Total Direct Funding to Domestic Violence Services	€581,525	€600,320	€650,492	€651,402	€520,379	€610,380	€656,036
Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes							
MOVE Ireland	€385,000	€359,972	€179,986	€210,000	€360,000	€402,000	€346,500
South East Domestic Violence Intervention Programme	€271,000	€251,150	€188,250	€231,042	€259,539	€278,000	€217,215
North East Domestic Violence Intervention Programme	€20,000	€12,750	€23,477	€22,682	€23,000	€24,000	€20,250
Total Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes	€676,000	€623,872	€391,713	€463,724	€642,539	€704,000	€583,965
Overall Totals	€1,257,525	€1,224,192	€1,042,205	€1,115,126	€1,162,918	€1,314,380	€1,240,001

Questions - Written Answers
Victim Support Services

120. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding allocated by his Department to County Louth in each of the years 2011 to 2016; the victim support organisations that were funded from these allocations; and the amount of funding allocated in each case. [45409/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that funding is not generally allocated to counties per se. However, details of funding provided through various schemes to projects located in County Louth in the timeframe specified by the Deputy are set out in the following table.

2011

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Women's Aid Dundalk	14,500
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Drogheda Women's Refuge & Children's Refuge Centre	15,000
Counselling for victims of crime	Dundalk Counselling Service	19,800
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Rape Crisis North East	6,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Drogheda Women's Refuge	3,000
COSC Domestic Violence intervention programme	North East Domestic Violence Intervention programme	20,000
High Voltage - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	107,091
TEAM - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Muirhevnannor Community Youth Service – Dundalk	157,142
Cox's Demesne - Young Person's Probation Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	152,950
		Total: 495,483

2012

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Women's Aid Dundalk	13,800
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Drogheda Women's Refuge & Children's Refuge Centre	9,500
Counselling for victims of crime	Dundalk Counselling Service	19,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Rape Crisis North East	5,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Women's Aid Dundalk	3,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Drogheda Women's and Children Refuge Ltd	1,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Dundalk Outcomers	2,000
COSC Domestic Violence intervention programme	North East Domestic Violence Intervention programme	12,750
High Voltage - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	110,591
TEAM - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Muirhevnannor Community Youth Service – Dundalk	142,627
Boyne - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Youth Work Ireland Louth - Drogheda	105,234

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Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
CABLE - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Foróige – Dundalk	63,318
Cox's Demesne - Young Person's Probation Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	152,950
		Total: 640,770

2013

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Women's Aid Dundalk	16,560
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Drogheda Women's Refuge & Children's Refuge Centre	9,500
Counselling for victims of crime	Dundalk Counselling Service	19,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Rape Crisis North East	5,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Drogheda Women's and Children Refuge Ltd	1,200
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Women's Aid Dundalk	1,000
COSC Domestic Violence intervention programme	North East Domestic Violence Intervention programme	23,477
High Voltage - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	109,505
TEAM - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Muirhevnanmor Community Youth Service – Dundalk	150,602
Boyne - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Youth Work Ireland Louth - Drogheda	105,234
CABLE - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Foróige – Dundalk	66,734
Cox's Demesne - Young Person's Probation Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	145,000
		Total: 652,812

2014

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Women's Aid Dundalk	14,000
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Drogheda Women's Refuge & Children's Refuge Centre	9,500
Counselling for victims of crime	Dundalk Counselling Service	19,000
Support for patient victims of crime	Dignity 4Patients	10,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Rape Crisis North East	4,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Drogheda Women's and Children Refuge Ltd	1,000
COSC Domestic Violence intervention programme	North East Domestic Violence Intervention programme	22,682
High Voltage - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	113,238
TEAM - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Muirhevnanmor Community Youth Service – Dundalk	148,500
Boyne - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Youth Work Ireland Louth - Drogheda	104,751
CABLE - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Foróige – Dundalk	66,734

Questions - Written Answers

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Cox's Demesne - Young Person's Probation Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	144,000
		Total: 657,405

2015

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Women's Aid Dundalk	14,000
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Drogheda Women's Refuge & Children's Refuge Centre	9,500
Counselling for victims of crime	Dundalk Counselling Service	19,000
Support for patient victims of crime	Dignity 4Patients	10,000
COSC Awareness raising grant scheme	Rape Crisis North East	4,000
COSC Domestic Violence intervention programme	North East Domestic Violence Intervention programme	23,000
High Voltage - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	109,500
TEAM - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Muirhevnemor Community Youth Service – Dundalk	148,500
Boyne - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Youth Work Ireland Louth - Drogheda	105,234
CABLE - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Foróige – Dundalk	61,404
Cox's Demesne - Young Person's Probation Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	147,500
		Total: 651,638

2016

Project Name/Type	Location/Organisation	Amount €
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Women's Aid Dundalk	16,500
Court accompaniment for female victims of domestic violence	Drogheda Women's Refuge and Children's Refuge Centre	10,000
Counselling for victims of crime	Dundalk Counselling Centre	20,000
Support for patient victims of crime	Dignity 4Patients	10,500
COSC Domestic Violence intervention programme	North East Domestic Violence Intervention programme	24,000
High Voltage - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	109,500
TEAM - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Muirhevnemor Community Youth Service – Dundalk	148,500
Boyne - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Youth Work Ireland Louth - Drogheda	105,234
CABLE - Garda Youth Diversion Project	Foróige – Dundalk	66,734
Cox's Demesne - Young Person's Probation Project	Cox's Demesne – Dundalk	147,500
		Total: 658,468

Garda Operations

121. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions being put in place by An Garda Síochána to combat a series of recent burglaries (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45422/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have sought a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the issues raised and I will respond directly to the Deputy when the report is to hand. I want to assure the Deputy that I am very much aware of the impact of crime on rural communities, including the serious damage done by organised gangs who target rural areas to engage in burglary and other property-related crime.

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 Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. However, I can assure the Deputy that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that optimum use is made of these resources.

The success of the Garda measures to tackle burglary being implemented through Operation Thor is borne out by latest available CSO crime figures which show a very significant decline in property related crime. It is encouraging to note that since the launch of Operation Thor in late 2015, the CSO burglary figures have shown a significant 30% decrease in burglary for the twelve months of 2016 when compared to 2015.

As the Deputy is aware, Operation Thor involves a broad range of activities to tackle organised crime gangs and other prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. This comprehensive operation is supported by the enhanced Government investment in Garda resources, including an allocation of almost €100 million for Garda overtime in 2017. We have also invested heavily in the Garda fleet, with over 720 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015 and a provision of €46 million for new Garda vehicles under the Capital Plan 2016-2021.

These additional investments in policing make it possible to maintain and extend a range of intensive policing operations, including the continued targeting of burglaries and related crime via Operation Thor.

Under Operation Thor we have seen over 83,260 targeted checkpoints and 61,580 crime prevention patrols nationwide. This concentrated policing activity has produced in the region of 5,540 arrests and 6,150 charges covering a range of offences which, in addition to burglary, have included handling stolen property, possession of firearms and drugs offences.

This Government has also made it a particular priority to strengthen our legislative provisions through the enactment of the Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Act 2015 which is targeted at repeat burglars who have previous convictions and who are charged with multiple offences of residential burglary. This new legislation is now available to support the work which is being carried out by An Garda Síochána under Operation Thor.

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 be aware that, as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders, including the farming organisations.

There are a range of partnership initiatives which have been established between An Garda Síochána and important rural-based organisations such as the Irish Farmers Association, Muin-tir na Tire and other rural community organisations. These include the well established Com-

munity Alert Programme, which receives annual funding from my Department, as well as the work of the Metal Theft Forum, the Crimestoppers campaign highlighting the Theft of Live-stock, the Theftstop initiative in relation to farm equipment, and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme.

Furthermore, I was pleased to recently 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 in the Scheme can find more details at www.muintir.ie.

The Deputy will be aware that An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 places a strong emphasis on developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation and enhancing the current delivery model so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. It will result in the introduction of multi-skilled Community Policing Teams in every District. Community Policing Teams will be made-up of Gardaí from a number of different units who will work with the local community to prevent and detect crime. Undoubtedly, the ongoing recruitment process will support all Garda activities and will enhance the provision of effective Community Policing throughout the country.

The 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. The substantial increase in Garda numbers is tangible progress on achieving this Government's vision of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

Law Reform Commission Reports

122. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the Law Reform Commission's 2005 report on multi party litigation; his further views on the recommendations of the report; if he will legislate to implement them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45432/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position in relation to the matters which the Deputy has raised remains as I have conveyed in my Written Reply to Question No. 182 of 24 October 2017 which I shall therefore reiterate on this occasion.

The issue of multi-party litigation was the subject of a Report and recommendations by the Law Reform Commission in 2005 (LRC 76-2005) as the Deputy has mentioned. The Report was not carried forward by the Government of the day. The implementation of the Report at this remove, and the introduction of any legislation to enable the type of collective legal action envisaged, would require a detailed consideration of the merits and impacts in the public interest, including in terms of the sustainability of a collective action regime and its potential

costs to the parties concerned and to the Exchequer. The areas of law involved include consumer protection, competition, the environment and the provision of financial and other services. Consideration would also have to be given to the relevant intervening developments that have taken place at the national, European Union and wider international levels. While not part of the current Legislation Programme, therefore, this remains a complex area of legislative reform that will require renewed and thorough consideration. As such, I will continue to bear it in mind for discussion and possible action in the general context of any upcoming reforms in the civil justice area.

International Bodies Membership

123. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the persons from his Department who are attending the chiefs of police conference 2017 in Philadelphia; his views on whether the number of persons attending is excessive; the costs for same; if other persons are attending at a cost to the exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45507/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I believe the Deputy is referring to the 2017 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Conference which was held in Philadelphia from 21 to 24 October 2017. My Department was not represented at the Conference.

I am aware however, that in common with previous years, both the Garda Síochána and the Policing Authority were represented at the conference, as was the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

It is a matter for the independent bodies concerned to determine their representation at such events, subject to the usual rules governing travel by public servants.

Garda Stations

124. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the acquisition of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45541/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I would refer the Deputy to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 221 on 3 October 2017, Wherein I confirmed that the OPW and the Chief State Solicitor's Office continue to progress the acquisition of the site in question as a high priority and expect the process to reach a conclusion shortly.

Following a further contact between my Department and the OPW, I can confirm that the position is as outlined above.

Immigrant Investor Programme Administration

125. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the review of the immigration investor programmes as outlined in the justice sector Estimates 2017; if it has concluded; if so, the findings it has made; his plans to publish the review; if not, the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45547/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a limited internal review of the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) was concluded in Q3 2017. It was highlighted that as applications to the IIP had only gained momentum in the second half of 2016, it would be difficult to carry out an in depth evaluation and draw useful conclusions at this stage. It was also noted that as the majority of IIP investments were only made relatively recently to evaluate their effectiveness at this early stage may not provide sufficient material for any useful lessons to be learned and conclusions to be reached. My Department, does however, intend to have a more comprehensive review and analysis undertaken in due course. In the circumstances, it is not proposed to publish the review in question.

Family Reunification Applications

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a family reunification will take place in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45572/17]

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 referred to by the Deputy is resident here on the basis of an extension of student permission, as an exceptional measure, to allow the person to seek an employment permit-based permission. This temporary permission is due to come to an end in January 2018.

There is no family reunification application submitted for, or on behalf of, the person concerned. All applications for family reunification must be made in line with the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification which can be found at www.inis.gov.ie.

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

Naturalisation Applications

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the naturalisation application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45573/17]

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 referred to by the Deputy married an Irish National in January 2017 and in March 2017 made an application to INIS for permission to remain in the State, as the spouse of an Irish National.

I understand that a request for documentation issued to the person concerned on 09 October

2017 and INIS are currently awaiting a response.

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

Residency Permits

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a stamp 4 will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45574/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the first person referred to by the Deputy was granted Long Term Residency (stamp 4) on 03 February 2009 for five years. INIS did not receive an application for renewal of this Long Term Residency permission (stamp 4). This person, however, currently holds a Stamp 1 permission to remain in the State valid to 20 August 2018.

The immigration permission of the second person referred to by the Deputy, expired on 28 June 2013.

I wish to inform the Deputy, that the INIS does not currently have any application in respect of this person before them. It appears that the person concerned does not, therefore, have permission to remain in the State, and they should be aware that it is illegal for them under the Immigration Act 2004 to reside in the State without the permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable, under Section 13 of the Immigration Act of 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

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

Residency Permits

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a stamp 4 will be renewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45575/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in respect of the first person mentioned by the Deputy, their last immigration permission expired on 28 June 2013. Subsequent to this date, there is no further immigration record of them residing in the State.

Regarding the second person mentioned by the Deputy, INIS advise me that their last im-

migration permission expired on 02 August 2013. Subsequent to this date, there is no further immigration record of them residing in the State.

From the information provided by the Deputy, it appears that both persons are continuing to reside illegally in the State without permission. Should this be the case, they should be aware that under Section 5 of the Immigration Act 2004, it is unlawful for a non-national to be in the State other than in accordance with the terms of any permission given by the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person who contravenes such a requirement may have committed an offence and if found guilty is liable under Section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both.

In order to allow INIS make a full assessment of this case, both persons should be advised to write to Unit 2 - Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 clarifying their current residency location i.e. are they currently residing inside or outside the State. They should include a detailed explanation of their activities since the both last had permission to reside in the State, what their future plans are, and should also supply full copies of all passports, their marriage certificate, birth certificates of any children and work permits.

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

Residency Permits

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when permission to remain stamp 4 or alternative updated residency status will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45576/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application for the Reactivation of Employment Permit Permission for the person concerned remains under consideration. INIS will be in contact with the person concerned 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.

Residency Permits

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an application for long-term residency status will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45577/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they received a request from the person concerned, in January 2015, to regularise their residency status in the State. INIS wrote directly to them, at their last known address, on three separate occasions. No response was received to these requests.

INIS will issue a further letter to this person requesting additional information and documentation in order to consider the case.

It appears that this person has no permission to be in the State. In this regard, I would draw the Deputy's attention to Section 5 of the Immigration Act 2004, which provides that no non-national may be in the State other than in accordance with the permission of the Minister. A person who contravenes this requirement is for all purposes unlawfully present in the State. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable under Section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004 to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months.

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

Residency Permits

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a stamp 4 renewal will be facilitated in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45578/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further one year period to 14 December 2017. This decision was conveyed in writing to the persons concerned by letters dated 13 December 2016. This permission was renewed to enable the persons concerned to obtain a valid passport or alternatively submit evidence as to what effort they have made to secure a passport.

A representative of the INIS wrote to the persons concerned on 30 August 2017 requesting the submission of specific documentation. There is no record of the requested documentation having been submitted to date. The position in the State of the persons concerned can be further considered upon receipt of the requested documentation.

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

Residency Permits

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[45579/17]

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 03 October 2017. The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt with in chronological order. If further information or documentation is required, the person concerned will be contacted in writing by the relevant officials in my Department 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.

Residency Permits

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if leave to remain stamp 4 will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45580/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his/her legal representative should contact the International Protection Office (IPO) or International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly.

The IPO may be contacted either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either by email to info@protectionappeals.ie, by telephone at 01 474 8400 or Lo-Call 1890 201 458 or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

Naturalisation Applications

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45582/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State

but also at European Union level, and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

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

Subsidiary Protection Applications

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 352 of 20 September 2017, which failed to address the questions raised in the case of a person (details supplied), if their case can be considered with a view to granting stamp 4 status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45583/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware from the previous response to this question on 12 October last, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

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

The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are also independent in the performance of their protection functions.

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

Naturalisation Applications

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which consideration has been given to an application for naturalisation in the case of a person

(details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45584/17]

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

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

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

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

Garda Strength

138. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the full strength of An Garda Síochána across all ranks as of 1 October 2017. [45626/17]

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.

I am informed by the Commissioner that on the 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of An Garda Síochána was 13,412. There are also 607 Garda Reserves and more than 2,000 civilians attached to An Garda Síochána.

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. In addition, 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.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

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.

For the Deputy's information I have set out below, as provided by the Commissioner, the number of Gardaí assigned by rank as of 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

Rank	Strength on 30 September 2017
Commissioner	1 (Acting)
Deputy Commissioner	1
Assistant Commissioner	9
Chief Superintendent	42
Superintendent	159
Inspector	284
Sergeant	1896
Garda	11020
Total	13,412

Built Heritage Investment Scheme

139. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there is specific grant assistance available towards the necessary upgrade of an old dwelling house which would be regarded as a heritage building; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45416/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our built heritage is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the roles of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

Financial support is delivered by my Department for the protection of heritage buildings under structured schemes which are administered via the local authorities.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures (i.e. structures on the local authority Record of Protected Structures). This year I have approved €3.5 million in funding for approximately 500 projects across the country, creating employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and

are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This year the I have approved €1.324 million in funding for 67 projects nationally. The Fund seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost.

In the context of a particular building, especially one which is on the Record of Protected Structures, the best advice for the owner may be to contact the Architectural Conservation Officer or Heritage Officer in their local authority who will be able to advise on the various types of funding available to assist with the building.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports annually, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources. Grant schemes are advertised by the Heritage Council on its website www.heritagecouncil.ie.

Archaeological Sites

140. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the process for designation of the recently discovered human remains from the Iron Age period at a site (details supplied) as a national monument and a site of local significance; if protection will be introduced to secure this site and prevent damage or plundering; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45550/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The State Pathologist's Office has investigated the human remains recently exposed in this case by Storm Ophelia and has determined that they are of ancient origin. As a consequence, National Museum of Ireland officials in consultation with officials from my Department's National Monuments Service, have carefully removed the visible remains for safekeeping.

My Department is arranging for further archaeological investigations to be carried out which will help to both inform and contextualise the discovery. While it has been reported that the site might date to the Iron Age, this cannot be determined categorically ahead of the planned further investigations. The site itself will ultimately be entered onto the Sites and Monuments Record and will thus be protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004.

I want to commend the local community for promptly reporting the matter and to thank them and the local authority for securing the site, for preventing unwanted interference and for its co-operation with the planned further investigations that are about to take place.

This discovery also highlights the significant risks to our vulnerable archaeological monuments and historic buildings from extreme weather events. I am accordingly supporting the adoption, by the end of 2018, of a formal Sectorial Climate Adaptation Plan for Built and Archaeological Heritage which will identify risks and appropriate mitigation measures to help safeguard our heritage for future generations.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Eligibility

141. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason a person (details supplied) who is the successor of the owner of a bog in a natural heritage area has not been paid their compensation which they are due as the owner of same;

the steps she will take to have same addressed without delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45565/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has not been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. I understand that my Department is sending an application form to this individual for completion and return.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

142. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is eligible to have hip replacement surgery performed under the National Treatment Purchase Fund. [45351/17]

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. Budget 2018 allocated additional funding in the region of €10m for the remainder of 2017 to fund patient treatment across a range of key specialties and procedures.

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 27,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 9,476 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its Day Case Initiative, 3,415 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 1,499 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 3,645 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 1,310 offers of treatment have been accepted and 573 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, over 94,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

Under waiting list initiatives run by the NTPF, the NTPF liaises directly with hospitals to identify patients to be treated. The patients are then contacted to arrange the details of treatment.

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

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

Questions - Written Answers
Health Services Funding

143. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the public non-capital expenditure on health in each of the budget years 2007 to 2018, in tabular form. [45352/17]

144. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the public non-capital expenditure on health excluding treatment benefits in each of the budget years 2007 to 2018, in tabular form. [45353/17]

145. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the public capital expenditure on health in each of the budget years 2007 to 2018 in tabular form. [45354/17]

146. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the public expenditure on health in each of the budget years 2007 to 2018 in tabular form. [45355/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 to 146, inclusive, together.

The gross public non capital, capital and total expenditure on health in each of the budget years 2007 to 2018 is set out below in tabular form. From 2007 to 2014 the expenditure represents the aggregate of expenditure on the Vote of the Office of the Minister for Health & Children and the Vote of the Health Service Executive. With effect from 31 December 2014, the Vote of the Health Service Executive was disestablished and from 2015 onwards, the Health Service Executive was funded from grants payable from the Vote of the Office of the Minister for Health. This analysis excludes expenditure on the Treatment Benefit Schemes which are administered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Gross Expenditure Outturn

Year	Current	Capital	Total
2007	13,791,202	587,937	14,379,139
2008	14,801,906	592,923	15,394,829
2009	14,982,559	546,427	15,528,986
2010	14,334,183	465,835	14,800,018
2011	13,760,940	426,611	14,187,551
2012	13,798,486	433,456	14,231,942
2013	13,659,284	432,596	14,091,880
2014	13,259,984	477,695	13,737,679
2015	12,953,874	386,874	13,340,748
2016	13,689,578	417,642	14,107,220
2017 ¹	14,152,280	454,250	14,606,530
2018 ²	14,797,880	493,250	15,291,130

¹2017 Estimate in REV 2017

² 2018 Estimate in Budget Day Book

Hospitals Funding

147. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prioritise the provision of capital funding for the new endoscopy unit and other ancillary services at Naas General Hospital, Naas, County Kildare, from the additional capital allocation of €471 million announced under the mid term capital review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45380/17]

148. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prioritise the provision

of capital funding for phase 3C of Naas General Hospital, Naas, County Kildare, from the additional capital allocation of €471 million announced under the mid term capital review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45381/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 148 together.

The new Capital Envelope announced in the context of Budget 2018 is being used by the HSE to revise the Capital Plan and also in preparing the National Service Plan for 2018. Therefore I am not in a position to say what projects will be funded next year.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

149. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if speech and language therapy will be provided for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45384/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

150. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1018 of 11 September 2017, the length of time the 1,647 persons on the waiting list for cataract surgeries at the Mater hospital to date in 2017 have been waiting by month, in tabular form. [45386/17]

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

Vaccination Programme

151. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if claims that the symptoms of the 650 persons who have received the HPV vaccine fit in with a recently described phenomenon known as autoimmune and inflammatory syndrome induced by adjuvants (details supplied) will be examined by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45387/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Adjuvants (immune potentiators or immuno-

modulators) have been used for decades to improve the immune response to vaccine antigens. The incorporation of adjuvants into vaccine formulations is aimed at enhancing, accelerating and prolonging the specific immune response towards the desired response to vaccine antigens. Advantages of adjuvants include the enhancement of the immunogenicity of antigens, modification of the nature of the immune response, the reduction of the antigen amount needed for a successful immunisation, the reduction of the frequency of booster immunisations needed and an improved immune response in the elderly and immunocompromised.

Of the approximately 650 reports of suspected adverse reactions that were received by the Health Products Regulatory Authority and classified as serious, in the majority of these cases the medical care required was for the treatment of vaccination related events, such as fainting around the time of vaccination, or treatment for injection site reactions such as headache, rash, itching (or other allergic-type reactions), fever, muscle pain and gastrointestinal effects, such as nausea and vomiting. Such reactions are typically transient in nature and as such do not represent autoimmune and inflammatory conditions.

Health Services Provision

152. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be operated on to treat their scoliosis and will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45391/17]

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

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

Health Services Provision

153. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a reply from the HSE regarding a request for extra hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45410/17]

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 Provision

154. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will bring forward legislation making it mandatory to make a defibrillator available in each public building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45411/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2014 HIQA published a health technology assessment on providing defibrillators in public spaces. They found that, based on available evidence, none of the public access defibrillation programmes that were assessed were consid-

ered cost-effective using conventional willingness to pay thresholds.

Following on from this, early this year, the Health Service Executive established an Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Steering Group. The purpose of this project is to improve survival rates for those who suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest through the development and implementation of an out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy. This work will support the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Community First Responder Ireland (CFR Ireland) in their commitment to improve clinical outcomes for Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA).

Both the NAS and CFR Ireland are working with other partners to enable a sustainable response to such events.

The HSE National Community First Responder framework for Ireland declared that CFRs offer a valuable and complementary resource to emergency ambulance provision, positively impacts NAS response time and achieves improved survival for OHCA. It demonstrated how the NAS and CFR Ireland intend to consolidate, enhance and implement further CFR schemes over the next five years through a National Community First Responder Framework. Its ambitions over the next few years include increasing the availability of training in CPR in schools, work places and local groups and making Public Access Defibrillators more easily accessible with people knowing how to use them. It also aims to:

- Work in partnership with all relevant organisations (statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors) to increase the availability of Public Access Defibrillators;

- Put in place effective arrangements to ensure that Public Access Defibrillators are mapped, maintained and accessible to the public; and

- Commence a public awareness campaign to increase the level of provision of CFR Schemes in geographical areas of priority.

And so one of the means to help improve outcomes in this area is CFR groups. These are people from local communities who are trained in basic life support and the use of defibrillators that attend a potentially life threatening emergency in their area. They are then able to provide an early intervention in situations such as heart attack or cardiac arrest by providing, among other things, resuscitation and defibrillation.

Cardiac First Responders (CFR) Ireland, launched in 2015, is the national umbrella organisation for Community First Responders Groups. CFR Ireland works with the National Ambulance Service, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council and the Centre for Emergency Medical Science UCD. Both the NAS and CFR Ireland currently support over 145 Community First Responder schemes throughout Ireland, who train community members to provide emergency care support.

If an emergency 999/112 call for cardiac arrest, choking, chest pain or breathing difficulties is made to the National Ambulance Service in an area where a CFR group is established, the on-duty CFR member gets a text from the National Ambulance Service at the same time that an ambulance is despatched with location and call details. The First Responder then goes straight to the scene and administers initial care (defibrillation if required) until the National Ambulance Service Emergency resources arrive.

Health Services Provision

155. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to

reduce the long waiting times being experienced by children in counties Cavan and Monaghan who are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [45413/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

156. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45420/17]

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.

Primary Medical Certificates

157. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a copy of a primary medical certificate for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can be furnished to their parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45431/17]

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 (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Equipment

158. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the staff and resources required to operate the genomic sequencing equipment at the Mater hospital will be provided by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45435/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive for a direct response

Hospital Appointments Status

159. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45442/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been re-

ferred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

160. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will have access to special services as required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45445/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. An illness that occurs around the time a vaccine is given and is already known to be common in adolescence does not imply the vaccine caused the problem. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition. It is important to reassure people that anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine cannot be held responsible for these illnesses.

The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services and the Health Service Executive are currently working to put in place a clinical care pathway appropriate to the medical needs of this group.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Applications

161. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when the review in respect of the reimbursement of long-term illness medical expenses for a person (details supplied) will be completed; if there is an onus on a medical clinician, pharmacist or other to advise a person regarding their entitlement to avail of the LTI scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45448/17]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

162. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when home help hours for a person (details supplied) will be allocated, in view of their medical needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45449/17]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme Payments

163. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of general practitioners charging medical card holders excessive sums of money for blood tests and ear syringing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45450/17]

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 which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition. The removal of wax by ear syringing is also considered to be comprehended by the GMS contract if the removal of wax forms part of the “proper and necessary treatment” required by an eligible patient. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that in recent times some GPs have begun to charge GMS patients for phlebotomy and ear syringing 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 they have been incorrectly charged for routine services by their GP, or the practice nurse on behalf of their GP, they should contact their Local Health Office, who can investigate the matter in accordance with the HSE complaints policy.

In order to achieve clarity on these issues, I have asked that any difference of perspective in relation to the provision of phlebotomy and ear syringing 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.

Health Reports

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the recommendations in a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45451/17]

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the finding within a report (details supplied) with particular reference to the concept that providing homely care within the nursing home sector is further compounded by ageism and stigma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45452/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

The overarching policy of the Government is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where this is not possible, the Health Service Executive supports access to quality long-term residential care where this is appropriate.

I am familiar with the particular research referred to by the Deputy, and he will be aware having met with me on the day that I was present at its launch in September. The report documents the views, likes, dislikes and wishes of persons living in our nursing homes.

I believe that it is fundamentally important that residents' rights and dignity are respected and valued and that their views are listened to and acted upon. The significant role that a nursing home fulfils in the provision of a "home from home" for its residents must be recognised and acknowledged. Residential services for older people should be person-centred and I am convinced that older people should be the driving force in the design and delivery of those services which are provided to them. Their voices and views should be listened to and they must be allowed play a meaningful role in shaping their own homes and communities.

This is, for example enshrined in the "National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland" (2016) developed by HIQA. The standards inter alia provide a framework for service providers for the continual development of person - centred services. Standard 1.3 outlines that residents have a right to exercise choice and have their needs and preferences taken into account in relation to services.

In relation to ageism in a broader context, the National Positive Ageing Strategy, published in 2013 provides a framework for cooperation to address age-related policy and service delivery across Government and society in the years ahead. The Strategy highlights that ageing is not just a health issue, but rather requires a whole of Government approach to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and well-being of our ageing citizens. Combatting ageism is one of the cross cutting objectives of the strategy. Revised arrangements for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy were approved by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform in October, 2016. The first National Positive Ageing Indicators Report was published in 2016 and is available on the Department's website. Earlier this year the Department facilitated the inaugural stakeholder Forum under the NPAS. The forum provided an opportunity for stakeholders to work collaboratively and to identify key priorities. Those stakeholders have been facilitated with an opportunity to directly engage with relevant Departments in relation to those identified priorities. The Department of Health intends to follow up with the stakeholders in relation to their experience, towards the end of the year.

Medicinal Products Regulation

166. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health if he will request that the manufacturers of statins sold here to make available the essential underlying research data used by each of the manufacturers regarding the adverse effects associated with statins. [45461/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority responsible for the regulation of human medicines in Ireland. Under European and Irish legislation, before a medicine can be placed on the Irish market, the manufacturer must seek an authorisation from the HPRA or, in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency. A determination on an application for authorisation of a medicinal product is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against the criteria of quality, safety and efficacy, legal and regulatory requirements. I have no role in the process of medicinal product authorisation.

All pharmaceutical companies seeking marketing authorisations for their medicines must provide evidence in a dossier which includes information from pre-clinical studies, clinical trials and manufacturing and testing data. The format of the dossier and type of data to be submitted is laid down in EU and national legislation and guidelines. Authorisation thereafter is made on the basis of initial and continuing benefit versus risk balance for specific therapeutic indications, having regard to the quality, safety and efficacy of the product for the proposed conditions of use.

The Summary of Product Characteristics for each medicine includes detailed information on the use, dosing recommendations, precautions for use, and the known side-effects of the medicine concerned. Information on the research data submitted to the competent authority is included in a number of sections, particularly section 5.1. The summaries for all products are accessible from the HPRA website (www.hpra.ie), including those for the statins authorised in Ireland, namely atorvastatin, fluvastatin, pitavastatin, pravastatin, rosuvastatin, and simvastatin, which are authorised under a range of brand names and in various strengths. The package leaflet for patients reflects the information described in the summary, but is required to be presented in an abbreviated and easy-to-read format.

Medicinal Products Prices

167. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the cost of statins purchased from the various manufacturers; the amount paid by the HSE; and the names of the manufacturers of same for each of the past five years, in tabular form [45462/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Strategies

168. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by his Department and by the HSE on educating persons to change lifestyle as a preventive measure against chronic disease in tabular form. [45463/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Health and Well-being Programme in my Department is responsible for coordinating the implementation of Healthy Ireland which is the National Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025. The Framework is based on evidence and experience from around the world which clearly shows that to create positive changes in health and well-being takes the involvement of the whole of Government and all of society working in unison. Since Healthy Ireland was launched in March 2013, my Department has launched the following health and well-being initiatives:

- *The National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 - 2020;*
- *Tobacco Free Ireland - Report of the Tobacco Policy Review Group;*
- *The National Positive Ageing Strategy;*
- *Get Ireland Active - National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland;*
- *A Healthy Weight for Ireland - Obesity Policy and Action Plan;*
- *The National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland Network; and*
- *Healthy Food for Life - The Healthy Eating Guidelines and Food Pyramid.*

It is not possible to identify in totality how much funding is currently spent on improving health and well-being across all Government Departments and agencies and in wider society.

Since the launch of Healthy Ireland, expenditure on its implementation from within the budget of the Department of Health has amounted to the following:

2013 - €89,315;

2014 - €586,470;

2015 - €607,706.83;

2016 - €1,156,405; and

2017 - €922,109.

In addition to the expenditure noted above, other expenditure arising within the Department could also be described as “Healthy Ireland” depending on classification.

Separate to the expenditure detailed above, the Government, in July 2016, approved the creation of a Healthy Ireland Fund and subsequently provided an initial allocation of €5 million in Budget 2017 to kick-start its establishment. The Fund was announced by An Taoiseach on Monday the 2 of October 2017.

The Healthy Ireland Fund will help drive the cross-governmental approach as set out in the Healthy Ireland Framework to improve the mental and physical health and well-being of the population. The main aim of the Fund is to support innovative, cross-sectoral, evidence based projects, programmes and initiatives that support the implementation of the key national policies in areas such as Obesity, Smoking, Alcohol, Physical Activity and Sexual Health. In particular the Fund will be for projects and programmes aimed at children and young people and their families, and supporting communities and vulnerable groups who are at most risk of experiencing health inequalities.

The Healthy Ireland Fund is managed and administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department and a further €5m has been made available for the Fund in Budget 2018.

As the Deputy is aware, operational responsibility for the delivery of specific initiatives promoting health and well-being by the health services is a matter for the HSE. Expenditure arising in the HSE, particularly in the Health and Well-being Division, could also be described as implementation of Healthy Ireland. However, it is not possible to disaggregate expenditure on promoting and improving health and well-being generally from overall HSE expenditure. Again, for example, within overall HSE expenditure, and in addition to work which is an integral part of the Health and Well-being Division, a large component of health promotion and improvement work takes place across the acute and primary care services as part of normal day to day activity. There is also expenditure arising in relation to communications campaigns by the HSE.

Radon Gas Levels

169. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a newly built €13 million mental health unit (details supplied) can now be found to have radon levels exceeding the recommended 200 becquerels per cubic meter; if the building regulations provision for radon gas as outlined by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, that requires that all buildings built since 1 July 1998 be fitted with a stand by radon sump was adhered to; the person or group that now has financial responsibility to rectify same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45465/17]

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

170. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allow for dental screening and treatment of persons under 16 years of age through the medical card scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45466/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Oral Health Policy, which the Department of Health is currently developing will inform future provision of oral health services. This is a 3-year project led by the Chief Dental Officer and is due to be completed later this year. The project includes a needs assessment, a review of resources and involves consultation with stakeholders, including dental professionals and the public.

Health Services Provision

171. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can be transferred to a more suitable HSE area in view of the fact that the area they are in does not provide the required level of service for their needs. [45467/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospitals Building Programme

172. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of refurbishments to a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45473/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The new Capital Envelope announced in the context of Budget 2018 is being used by the HSE to revise the Capital Plan and also in preparing the National Service Plan for 2018. Therefore I am not yet in a position to say what projects will be funded next year.

Medical Card Applications Data

173. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1201 of 11 September 2017, if the central medical card unit collate figures for applications received, processed, refused and awarded from individual CHOs or counties; the reason figures for individual CHOs or counties are not collated; and if he has given consideration to doing so for future sharing of information with Teachtaí Dála. [45491/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has responsibility for the processing of Medical Cards and I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy regarding the collation of Medical Card figures as described.

Home Care Packages Data

174. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages being provided in each local health office area, in tabular form. [45497/17]

175. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages being provided in each local health office area, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45498/17]

176. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours being provided in each local health office area, in tabular form. [45499/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 to 176, inclusive, together.

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

Nursing Staff Recruitment

177. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses newly recruited to date in 2017 across all sectors of the health service; and the net increase in nursing numbers resulting from this recruitment. [45500/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Health Services Staff Data

178. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists recruited to date in 2017; the sectors of the health service under which they have been recruited, that is, primary care, acute and disability services; and the net increase in speech and language therapist numbers resulting from this recruitment. [45501/17]

179. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists newly recruited to date in 2017; the sectors of the health service under which they have been recruited, that is, primary care, acute and disability services; and the net increase in occupational therapist numbers resulting from this recruitment. [45502/17]

180. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of physiotherapists newly recruited to date in 2017; the sectors of the health service under which they have been recruited, that is, primary care, acute and disability services; and the net increase in physiotherapist numbers resulting from this recruitment. [45503/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 to 180, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Health Services Staff Data

181. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists employed in each CHO area; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016 in tabular form. [45504/17]

182. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists employed in each CHO area; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016 in tabular form. [45505/17]

183. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of physiotherapists employed in each CHO area; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016 in tabular form. [45506/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 to 183, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Delays

184. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay for a person (details supplied) to receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45512/17]

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

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a database (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45519/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): There are no plans to develop a database along the lines referred to by the Deputy.

On the face of it, such an initiative would likely have significant data protection concerns.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

186. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if the medical card scheme covers the cost of general practitioners completing application forms for persons who hold a medical card, such as driving licence applications and local authority grant applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45527/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The GMS GP 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”. The completion of forms required for local authority grant applications would also be outside the terms of the GMS contract.

Consultation fees charged by GPs outside the terms of the GMS or GP Visit Card contracts are a matter of private contract between clinicians and their patients. I have no role in relation to such fees.

Proposed Legislation

187. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Health the stage of the Regulation of Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 1999; the work ongoing towards its enactment; and when it will come before Dáil Éireann. [45529/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Regulation of Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 1999 was a Private Member’s Bill proposed by Senator Mary Henry. This Bill was defeated at Second Stage in Seanad Éireann on 7 July 1999.

For the Deputy’s information on Tuesday 3 October 2017 the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research. Officials in my Department are engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill. The General Scheme is published on the Department’s website and has been submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health for review.

Hospital Investigations

188. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the Ireland east hospital group insisted that a full internal report on the death of a person (details supplied) be carried out before an inquest could be scheduled. [45530/17]

189. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the report into the death of a person (details supplied) being carried out and delivered to the Ireland east hospital group. [45531/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 189 together.

I can assure the Deputy that procedures are in place to record and review maternal deaths and to ensure that any learning is disseminated and applied to help improve our maternity services.

A maternal death is classified as a Serious Reportable Event and, as such, must be reported through the National Incident Management System within 24 hours. Investigations must be commenced within 48 hours of the organisation becoming aware of the incident and completed within four months of commencement. In addition, from now on, all maternal deaths will be subject to a review which is external to the Maternity Network/Hospital Group. I understand that maternal deaths are also reported to the Coroner as a ‘rule of practice’.

With regard to the specific information sought by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

HSE Investigations

190. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on and the reason for the conflict of interest for a member of the UCC maternal death inquiry team (details supplied) being involved in providing direct testimony in the inquest of a person concluded on 13 October 2017 in the Kilkenny Coroners Court, in view of the fact that the maternal death inquiry remit states specifically that all data it reviews on maternal deaths here must be anonymised. [45532/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the issue raised by the Deputy is an operational matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

General Practitioner Services

191. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he is considering charging a nominal fee of €5 per visit for free general practitioner care for those under 12 years of age. [45535/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The introduction of GP care without fees to all people over 70 and all children under 6 years of age in 2015 represents a major step forward in improving access, quality and affordability of health care in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the phased introduction of free GP care for all under-18s, subject to negotiations with GPs and noting the need for additional GPs to support the additional workload.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Report of the Committee on the Future of Healthcare which was published on 30 May 2017 recommended the phased introduction of universal GP care over the next five years.

Legislative changes will be required for any extension of GP care without fees to further cohorts of the population and the timetable will be subject to the outcome of discussions with GP representatives on this and other contractual matters currently being discussed. The Government's wish is that progress on the extension of free GP care to children under 12 can be made in 2018. However, the timetable will be subject to the outcome of discussions with GP representatives on this and other contractual matters currently being discussed. No decisions have yet been made in relation to the precise terms and conditions connected to the extension of GP access to children under 12.

Medicinal Products Availability

192. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the date he plans to make a drug (details supplied) available to phenylketonuria sufferers under the long-term illness scheme. [45536/17]

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 Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching a 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.

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

The NCPE assessment of the new dossier was completed on the 15 September 2017 and the NCPE did not recommend sapropterin 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.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

193. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the work of the expert reference group established to draft guidelines to facilitate the use of cannabis treatments under an access programme; when the guidelines will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45537/17]

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 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.

The Deputy will be aware that under the Misuse of Drugs legislation it is open to the Minister for Health to grant a license to an Irish registered medical practitioner for access to medical cannabis for a named patient. The granting of a licence is based on submission of an application to the Minister which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of treatment over time. To date two such

applications have been successful.

Ultimately it is the decision of the prescribing clinician, in consultation with their patient, to prescribe or not prescribe any particular treatment, including cannabis, for a patient under their care.

Applications received by the Department of Health are assessed without delay. Any consultant who requires further information or clarification in relation to the licence application process may contact the Department of Health directly.

Hospitals Data

194. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds and wards in all public and voluntary acute hospitals that were closed on 20 October 2017 or the latest date on which data for validated bed closures at hospital and ward level are available, in tabular form [45542/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy.

Hospitals Discharges

195. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of delayed discharges in all public and voluntary acute hospitals at the end of September 2017 or the latest date available; and the number of which have been delayed by time band (details supplied), in tabular form. [45543/17]

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.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

196. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if persons aged 75 years of age or over have experienced an emergency department wait time more than 24 hours to date in 2017; and if so, the hospital in which the wait occurred. [45544/17]

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.

Hospital Beds Data

197. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional beds that will be provided during winter 2017 to help ease hospital overcrowding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45545/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Tackling overcrowding in Emergency Departments is a key commitment of this Government and I am delighted that €40 million in additional funding in 2017 has been made available as part of the 2018 Budget to address winter pressures and waiting lists over the rest of this year.

This funding will be aimed at reducing overcrowding in our hospitals in this period through the provision of extra capacity and additional supports including the provision of social care measures such as additional home care packages and transitional care beds, funding to alleviate specific periods of ED overcrowding in hospitals by providing additional diagnostic services and surge capacity as required, support to drive public health campaigns including for the flu vaccine and additional funding for measures to reduce waiting times for the longest waiting patients. It is also envisaged that this funding will be used to strengthen capacity in the system through the funding of additional beds.

My Department and the HSE is currently engaging intensively on agreeing the details of this funding, and any additional bed capacity to be provided, and I look forward to sharing with colleagues the outcome of these discussions in due course.

Health Strategies

198. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the contingency plans in place for health services to cope with a greater 'flu outbreak than is normally experienced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45546/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Influenza can be a serious illness for people in 'at risk' groups which can lead to hospitalisation and death.

'At-risk' people include those aged 65 years and older, people with chronic illness requiring regular medical follow-up, those with lower immunity due to disease or treatment, pregnant women, and residents of nursing homes, and other long stay facilities.

The priority for this winter is to increase uptake of the influenza vaccine in 'at risk' groups and in health care workers to reduce and control the incidence of flu and outbreaks in the community and healthcare settings.

The Health Service Executive launched their influenza immunisation and 'Under the Weather' campaigns for the 2017-18 season earlier this month.

Reducing the incidence of influenza reduces the need for people to seek treatments, and consequently reduces the demands on health services.

The Health Service Executive has put in place significant measures to ensure it is prepared for influenza this winter:

- A national steering group is in place to coordinate the response;
- Each Hospital Group and Community Health Organisation has submitted a Flu plan based on the evidence of last year's successes and areas of concern for the oncoming season;
- Each Long Term Care Facility and Private Nursing Home has received a detailed communication on how to prepare and deal with flu; and
- Additionally, each Hospital Group and associated Community Health Organisation to produce a Winter Plan which includes a specific section on Flu.

These plans were reviewed at a national meeting earlier this week. It is expected that these preparations will significantly reduce the impact of influenza on the health services.

Medicinal Products Licensing

199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason tryptophan is banned here; and the number of other countries in which it is banned. [45548/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority responsible for the regulation of human medicines in Ireland. Medicines containing L-tryptophan are subject to prescription in Ireland, but the substance is not banned. Medicines containing L-tryptophan have not been authorised in Ireland since 2005, when Optimax was withdrawn by the marketing authorisation holder.

L-tryptophan is authorised in the UK, Austria and Spain as a prescription-only medicine; the HPRA does not have information on its status in other countries.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

200. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to examine the pay inequality that arises when public sector employees receive pay increases while employees section 39 organisations, such as an organisation (details supplied), remain on the same pay scale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45555/17]

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. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees, therefore neither the HSE nor the Minister have a role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff.

The staff of these Section 39 organisations are not public servants and therefore were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions. It follows then that the staff of the section 39 bodies will not be eligible for any pay restoration which is provided for under the more recent Public Service Agreements. 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 Remuneration

201. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to examine the pay and working conditions of HSE employed psychiatric nurses and consultant child psychiatrists to entice new staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45558/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I recognise that there are particular difficulties recruiting mental health staff at present and related workforce challenges. Psychiatry is a specialty where there are significant worldwide shortages and international competition for our doctors and nurses.

The HSE has been focused on increasing the number of front-line staff over the past two years as the budgetary position has improved and progress has been made in growing the consultant, NCHD and nursing workforce. While there are difficulties in filling posts in certain specialties, including psychiatry, the number of consultants employed in the public health system continues to increase year on year. At the end of August 2017 there were 2,913 whole time equivalents consultants in the public health service, an increase of 101 compared with the end

August 2016 and an increase of over 700 in the past decade. The number of NCHDs has also increased significantly. At the end of August 2017 there were 6,209 whole time equivalent NCHDs, an increase of 278 compared with the end of August 2016 number and an increase of over 1,100 in the past decade. The number of nursing and midwifery staff stood at 36,278 in August 2017; this is an increase of 739 whole time equivalents in the past 12 months, notwithstanding intense global competition for our nurses and midwives.

Recruitment of nurses and midwives is a key priority this year. The HSE have committed to offering permanent contracts to all graduate nurses, including mental health nurses. These contracts are being offered as part of the 2017 Nursing and Midwifery Agreement, reached with the INMO and SIPTU. This Agreement has a particular focus on addressing recruitment and retention of nursing and midwifery posts. It has committed to put in place an additional 1,224 nursing and midwifery posts across the public health service by the end of December 2017. This Agreement followed an agreement with the Psychiatric Nurses Association and SIPTU in summer 2016 that also includes a range of measures aimed at improving psychiatric nursing staffing levels. Very extensive and detailed work has been sustained throughout 2017 to implement these Agreements.

The Report of the Public Service Pay Commission identified problems in recruitment and retention in specific and specialist groups that are internationally in demand particularly in the health sector. Following the ratification of the Public Service Stability Agreement, the Commission will now carry out a more comprehensive examination of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in those sectors and employment streams where difficulties are clearly evident, including psychiatry. The Commission is committed to reporting on medical and nursing grades in 2018. The outcome of its assessment will be subject to discussions between the relevant parties.

Ambulance Service Response Times

202. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of response calls by the ambulance service for the Killarney area that took over 45 minutes to respond to, by month, in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45566/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be seen by their consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45581/17]

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.

Disease Incidence

204. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there is a higher instance of persons with haemochromatosis in specific parts of the country; if so, the variation between the different HSE regions; if there are standard procedures throughout the country for the treatment of such persons in view of the fact that there are substantial costs for persons attending hospitals as outpatients that do not have a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45604/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Research indicates that approximately 1 in 83 people in Ireland are predisposed to develop hereditary haemochromatosis. The HSE does not hold a database of individuals with haemochromatosis and therefore is not in a position to provide information in relation to the prevalence of this condition across the country.

A statutory daily charge is levied where a person has been referred to a hospital for an in-patient service, including that provided on a day case basis. Where venesection is classed as a day case procedure, and is not carried out in an out-patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies. Medical card holders are exempt from this charge.

Also, the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) operates a haemochromatosis clinic in the Stillorgan Blood Donation Clinic and sees approximately 600 patients there annually. The IBTS has also commenced provision of a programme for hereditary haemochromatosis patients in their D'Olier Street, Dublin and St. Finbar's Hospital, Cork clinics. These clinics provide phlebotomy free of charge to patients who have a prescription from their treating clinician.

Respite Care Services Provision

205. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the progress that will be made in 2018 in providing additional respite services (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the widespread concern about the inadequate services provided at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45605/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

206. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the measures that will be implemented to deal with anomalies in the provision of services for persons with a disability (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45606/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The HSE has operational responsibility for planning, managing and delivering home and community based services to both people with a disability and to older people. If the Deputy has a specific case in mind, please forward the details so the HSE can be asked to respond accordingly.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have referred the question to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Patronage

207. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the promised review of the religious patronage and ownership of hospitals and associated facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45618/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I announced the establishment of the Review Group on the role of Voluntary Organisations in the provision of publicly funded health and personal social services on 21 July, 2017. The Review Group was established by the Government in order to:

- examine current arrangements with regard to the role of voluntary agencies in the provision of services across the health and social care sector;
- consider the issues currently arising, and those that are likely to arise in the future, and
- make recommendations on how the relationship between the State and voluntary organisations should evolve in the future.

The Review Group members, Dr. Catherine Day (Chair), Prof. Jane Grimson and Prof. Deirdre Madden, commenced work in September, 2017. The Group is committed to open dialogue without any predetermined positions and has embarked on an initial fact finding phase and engagement process with key stakeholders on the role of voluntary organisations in this regard. It is expected that they will engage in a broader consultation process next year.

I expect that the Group will report to me within a year.

Hospital Facilities

208. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the costs associated with the upgrade of hospital systems to facilitate the MedLIS project for 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45619/17]

209. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the roll-out of the national MedLIS project in view of the HSE's claim that the delay was due to the need to accommodate changes that are required for the system to work in the right way for the health care system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45620/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 and 209 together.

MedLIS is a multi layered programme which impacts on the core Laboratory Service and on those healthcare staff who utilise the Laboratory Service namely General Practitioners, Acute Hospital staff and a number of Community Nursing Homes. It is a clinically led change programme which is technology enabled. It is intended that it will improve the delivery of diagnostic laboratory medicine, healthcare quality, efficiency and outcomes for patients in the Irish healthcare system. The existing laboratory systems, as with all digital systems, constantly require upgrading and maintenance. A number of currently deployed laboratory systems required hardware, operating system and database upgrades in 2014 and 2015 to ensure that they would

operate safely and be supported by the vendors of the system. These laboratory systems were deployed in the 1990's and have been upgraded several times in that time frame. The costs of these upgrades, which were mandatory, are as follows:

County	Upgrade Cost
Galway	€115,325
Cork	€394,990
Limerick	€494,696
Navan	€238,553
Waterford	€418,618

The strategic goal for the MedLIS Project is to ensure Irish healthcare providers have 24-hour access to complete and up-to-date accurate laboratory data across all sites. The project will replace all of the laboratory systems throughout the country and is being supported by technology teams from the HSE.

To achieve this goal, the HSE undertook a public procurement process for the supply of a national laboratory solution and Cerner Inc. were the successful bidders. The contract is a fixed price contract for the delivery of the Cerner solution replacing all the existing systems in the 43 HSE and Voluntary Laboratories with the Cerner Millennium system. All laboratory disciplines will be replaced including Biochemistry, Immunology, Endocrinology, Haematology, Microbiology, Virology, Histopathology, Cytopathology, Autopsy services, Blood Transfusion, Histocompatibility & Immunogenetics (tissue typing) and Molecular Diagnostics. It will also provide for the delivery of functional interfaces to multiple external systems, e.g., Order Communications Results Reporting, Patient Administration Systems, Healthlink and other national clinical systems, e.g., National Renal System.

Such a complex change programme has taken longer to design, test and implement than originally planned by both the HSE and Cerner. However, as the contract is a fixed price delivery contract the HSE does not incur any additional supplier costs due to schedule adjustments. The MedLIS project is primarily about patient safety and quality improvement of services being provided by the Laboratory Service. As such it is critically important that the solution is delivered in accordance with the workflows designed to the Irish Laboratory requirements. Schedule adjustments made now are done to ensure that the project will be fit for purpose, underpinning patient safety at all times and delivering a solution that is functionally beneficial for the Laboratory Service. The project is currently being closely monitored by the HSE project steering group and is on schedule to 'go-live' in St. James Hospital in Q2 2018.

Electronic Health Records

210. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the roll-out of the new national information technology systems for maternity hospitals; the expected date for this system to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45621/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Maternal & Newborn Clinical Management System (MN-CMS) is a pathfinder project towards developing a National Healthcare Electronic Record. The project started with the realisation that healthcare interaction in the future will ultimately be digital and it follows the strategic direction set out in the eHealth strategy for Ireland published in 2013.

Although the MN-CMS is primarily about the documentation and communication of mother

and baby clinical information, there are a number of other components. These include order communications (blood investigations, microbiological investigations, ultrasound, procedures) and drug prescribing. The MN-CMS project encompasses a wide range of stakeholders including midwives, obstetricians, neonatologists, anaesthetists and others in both the community and allied health specialties. Most importantly, the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management System aims to help put the patients at the centre of the care plan.

The programme is a large, complex business change and technological project. The system went live in Cork University Maternity Hospital (CUMH) in December 2016 and the Maternity Unit in University Hospital Kerry in March 2017. Integration between the GP's ICT system and the MN-CMS in the Cork region is due to commence on the 31st October. Following successful sign-off of the integration, it will be deployed to all GPs interacting with the Maternal & Newborn Clinical Management System.

As with any large-scale change programme there are lessons to be taken from the initial deployment and continuous process improvements to both the IT system and the workflows. Healthcare deployment of technology must always ensure that patient safety considerations are to the fore. The improvements are currently being deployed into both existing hospitals and the next hospitals due to implement the MN-CMS are the Rotunda Hospital and the National Maternity Hospital. I can confirm that the HSE have informed me that the Rotunda Hospital is due to go-live with the MN-CMS in November 2017 followed by the National Maternity Hospital in early 2018 and subsequently to all the remaining Maternity Hospital Units.

The changes brought about through the implementation of the MN-CMS have had a positive impact on the hospitals who have deployed it. The MN-CMS has brought about improvement in the management of patient information, patient safety and the communication between clinical teams. It has led to standardisation of information collection and in the future will lead to standardisation of care. Its future success will depend on a positive multi-disciplinary approach and a determination to be part of setting new national and international standards.

Afforestation Programme

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase the GPC 1 grant and premium to reflect the cost of establishment and the agricultural income foregone on land (details supplied) in the mid-term review of the forest programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45438/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Mid-Term Review of the Afforestation Programme is currently under preparation and my Department is involved in detailed discussions with stakeholders on it, including on the issues raised by the Deputy. Obviously any proposals must have regard to the available budget and the liability accruing for the State in future years. I expect that the Review will be published in the coming weeks.

Afforestation Programme

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the removal of the 20% restriction on planting unenclosed land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45439/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forestry

Programme 2014 -2020 is the legal basis for the afforestation scheme insofar as Ireland has State aid approval to support a planting programme from exchequer resources. Details regarding how Ireland proposed to undertake this planting programme were covered in the forestry programme document which included rules governing limitations on planting unenclosed land. Removal of the “20% rule” as it is known could be considered by the Commission as an alteration to an existing plan which could affect the Commission’s initial evaluation of the afforestation scheme in terms of its compatibility with the common market. Whether or not this is the case will most likely be determined in the context of Ireland’s compliance with minimum environmental requirements as set out in paragraph 509 of the European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas 2014 to 2020.

My Department met with Commission officials in December 2016 to seek their views on Ireland’s proposals to remove the 20% rule. After this meeting the Commission sought additional information which was provided and have invited Department officials to a further meeting this November.

Afforestation Programme

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the removal of the 20% restriction on planting unenclosed land in order that all land that is technically suitable is eligible under the programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45440/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department supports the lifting of the 20% rule and met with the European Commission in December 2016 to seek their approval to do so. After this meeting the Commission sought additional information which was provided and a further meeting is planned in November 2017. To support Ireland’s position, my Department, in consultation with the sector, produced Land Types for Afforestation (March 2016) and following a public consultation process also produced Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (December 2016). Ireland’s position is that these documents combined ensure that only both productive and non environmentally sensitive land is planted in the absence of the 20% rule.

Fishing Vessel Licences

214. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45443/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The appeal in question was heard on 4 September 2017 under the Independent Appeals System established by Part 3 of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003.

A determination granting the appeal was received from the Appeals Officer by e-mail on 10 September 2017.

The appeal determination has been given due consideration and it is now posted on my Department’s website.

Agriculture Scheme Applications

215. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of farm payments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45472/17]

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

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

Processing of the 2016 AEOS payment has now been finalised and both the first instalment and balancing payments due will issue to the person named shortly.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

216. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons awaiting areas of natural constraint scheme payments by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45514/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): 100,328 applications were received under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme of which 85,319 have been paid to date. Below is the breakdown of applications and payments by county. It should be noted that not all unpaid applications are eligible for payment. As is normal at this point in time, certain applicants are not currently eligible for payment as they have not yet fulfilled the necessary stocking requirements under the ANC scheme. Applicants have up to the end of the year to fulfil these requirements. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more cases fulfil the eligibility criteria.

County	Number of Applications	Number Paid
Carlow	742	643
Cavan	4,753	4,160
Clare	5,996	5,238
Cork	7,013	5,894
Donegal	8,550	6,960
Dublin	157	114
Galway	11,832	10,115
Kerry	7,599	6,361
Kildare	534	436
Kilkenny	1,724	1,512
Laois	1,680	1,473
Leitrim	3,401	2,929
Limerick	2,900	2,511
Longford	2,326	2,036
Louth	783	646
Mayo	11,324	9,500
Meath	1,341	1,155

County	Number of Applications	Number Paid
Monaghan	3,991	3,568
Offaly	2,392	2,004
Roscommon	5,603	4,780
Sligo	3,934	3,344
Tipperary	4,425	3,812
Waterford	1,412	1,140
Westmeath	2,632	2,262
Wexford	1,495	1,178
Wicklow	1,789	1,548
Total	100,328	85,319

Compensation Schemes

217. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce the process and support funding model that operated previously in 2014, for the loss of fishing gear experienced by fishermen along the County Wexford coast and in other coastal areas in order to ensure that the fishing industry is supported and to enable fishermen to return to work as quickly as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45549/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme is the vehicle for financial supports to the seafood sector up to 2021. The Programme delivers a wide range of supports for aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing through a suite of 15 schemes.

The EMFF Regulation provides for a special compensation scheme for fishermen experiencing significant economic losses arising from severe storms etc. Article 35 foresees the establishment by fishermen of a 'Mutual Fund for Adverse Climatic Events and Environmental Incidents'. This Fund would act as a form of mutual insurance for otherwise uninsurable losses, by paying compensation to affiliated fishermen for losses that exceed 30% of the fisherman's annual turnover arising from severe storms and other adverse climatic events, losses arising from environmental incidents and for the costs of rescue at sea for fishermen or fishing vessels.

The Fund must be established and managed by fishermen and be funded through the subscriptions of affiliated fishermen. The compensation would only be available to fishermen affiliated to the Fund. Support to the Fund from the EMFF Programme would be in the form of a contribution to the costs of compensation paid out by the Fund. Depending on the type of vessels or fishermen experiencing losses, EMFF assistance may be up to 80%.

My Department and BIM stand ready to assist and advise fishermen and their representatives in establishing the Fund, but the EMFF does not permit a financial contribution towards the costs of establishment or management of the Fund.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

218. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will request Coillte to treat the independent growers and suppliers to it fairly in accepting the first and second thinnings and pulp which is a byproduct of the industry in the autumn and vital for their business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45560/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as transactions with suppliers and customers, are the responsibility of the company. The matter raised is entirely a commercial matter between Coillte and its potential suppliers.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

219. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the medium and long-term plans Coillte has in managing and developing in the interests of all parties the contract arrangements with private growers and suppliers to it in view of the fact that arrangements are not satisfactory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45561/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as contractual arrangements with private growers and suppliers, are the responsibility of the company. The matter raised by the Deputy is entirely a commercial matter between the company and its suppliers.

Brexit Issues

220. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has had specific engagement with farming and agrifood interests in Northern Ireland on the difficulties that will arise for this sector due to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45601/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Brexit poses enormous challenges for the agri-food sector in Ireland by virtue of its reliance on the UK market, and particularly the integrated nature of the trade with Northern Ireland.

The most immediate impact of Brexit has been the significant drop in the value of sterling against the euro, while some of the anticipated longer-term challenges are likely to include tariffs and trade, divergence in regulations and standards, border controls, and certification (including animal and plant health certification).

I and my officials have engaged extensively and on an ongoing basis with our UK counterparts, including those in Northern Ireland, since the Referendum result was announced in June 2016. Regular consultation has taken place at senior official level, both in the context of the North South Ministerial Council and on a more informal bilateral basis with Belfast and London, in an effort to maintain open and constructive lines of communication as developments have unfolded. These contacts will continue.

Prior to the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly in January 2017, I met with Michelle McIlveen (DUP), the then Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on a number of occasions to discuss the impact Brexit could have on the agri-food sector. These included more formal engagements in the context of the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC), such as those in Armagh in October 2016 and at the Plenary in November 2016.

In addition, I have hosted four All-Island Civic Dialogue events since last December, for thirteen different agri-food sectors under the Department of the Taoiseach's All Island Civic

Dialogue process. The Northern Ireland agri-food sector has been very strongly represented at these events. In all of these engagements we discussed the severe implications that Brexit could have for cross border agri-food trade in particular, and the potential steps that could be taken to mitigate its impact.

All of the information gathered at these events has fed into my Department's preparations for the forthcoming negotiations as part of the EU 27 negotiating team.

The Government remains very focused on supporting the agri-food industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop, and I will continue to press Ireland's case for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

221. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of areas of natural constraint payments made to date in County Cavan; when the remaining payments will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45602/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme commenced as scheduled in the third week of September. To date payments worth €184m have issued to some 85,300 farmers.

In respect of County Cavan, a total of 4,753 applications have been received of which 4,160 have been paid to date. As is normal at this juncture many farmers are not yet eligible for payment as they have not yet fulfilled the necessary stocking requirements under the ANC scheme. Applicants have up to the end of the year to fulfil these requirements.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

222. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of areas of natural constraint payments made to date in County Monaghan; when the remaining payments will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45603/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme commenced as scheduled in the third week of September. To date payments worth €184m have issued to some 85,300 farmers.

In respect of County Monaghan, a total of 3,991 applications have been received of which 3,568 have been paid to date. As is normal at this juncture, certain farmers are not currently eligible for payment as they have not yet fulfilled the necessary stocking requirements under the ANC scheme. Applicants can have up to the end of the year to fulfil these requirements.

GLAS Data

223. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of commonage farmers by county in tabular form; the number of commonage farmers who have applied to GLAS 1, 2 and 3; the number of commonage farmers who have had their applications processed by county; the number of commonage farmers by county who have received and not received their 2015 and 2016 GLAS payments; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [45610/17]

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of commonage farmers who have completed a commonage management plan (CMP), by county, in tabular form; the number of commonage farmers who have not completed a CMP; the number of commonage farmers that have received 2016 GLAS payments 85% and 15% payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45611/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 and 224 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy when it is available.

Commonage Framework Plans

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the 31 October 2017 deadline for submission of commonage management plans as required under GLAS (details supplied); if no delays will be made in advance of 2017 GLAS payments in view of the fact that the issues being encountered are beyond the control of commonage farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45612/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Commonage advisors have been assigned to prepare GLAS Commonage Management Plans (CMPs) for the commonages involved. Information sessions for GLAS Advisors on the GLAS online system were held and a video demonstrating the system has been made available. The online system opened on 19 September with the submit button to finalise CMPs available since 12 October. CMPs must be submitted before 2017 advance payments can issue and a target of 31 October has been set for the submission of these plans. Plans submitted later in the year will continue to be processed for payment but will likely miss the first round of payments for the 2017 advance.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Data

226. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in the REPS scheme at its peak under the rural development programme. [45613/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of participants in REPS in 2005 was close to 47,500. Numbers peaked in 2006 with just over 59,000 farmers in the scheme. This reduced to just over 54,000 in 2007 and under 47,000 in 2008.

Statutory Instruments

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he consulted with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in advance of SI No. 413 of 2017 issuing on road testing of tractors; and if he relayed the potential concerns of farmers impacted. [45615/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Depart-

ment of Transport, Tourism and Sport is the competent authority for legislation on the roadworthiness of vehicles, governed by the EU Roadworthiness Testing Directive (Directive 2014/45/EU). In this context the Department of Transport introduced new regulations to provide for the introduction of compulsory testing of tractors used for commercial road haulage purposes. These regulations, in the form of statutory instrument No. 413 of 2017, specifically relate to Category T tractors with a maximum design speed exceeding 40km/hr and operating at a distance exceeding 25 km from the address at which the owner ordinarily resides or carries on business. It is understood that the legislation is not intended to apply to tractors used by farmers in the course of carrying out their normal farming activities but rather applies to commercial road haulage activities.

The Road Safety Authority, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, convened a forum to examine any technical points arise in the implementation of the regulation. Stakeholders across the agricultural sector, including officials from my Department, are represented at this forum and have the opportunity to present their views on relevant issues.

I will forward your correspondence to my colleague, Mr. Shane Ross TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, as Minister with responsibility for vehicle testing.

TAMS Data

228. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the findings of the spending review carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the TAMS II scheme; the number of TAMS II participants by farm size (details supplied); the number of approvals; and the number of payments made, in tabular form. [45616/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The spending review carried out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform highlighted the fact that the TAMS II Scheme has been very successful in the rate of approvals that have been issued to farmers since the Scheme was launched in mid-2015. In order for the success of the Scheme to translate into concrete improvements to the infrastructure of individual farms across the country it is now up to the applicants to act on these approvals. My Department continues to facilitate the on-going issuing of approvals and urges all farmers who have completed their works to submit their payment claims to the online system.

The data requested is given in the following table:

Category	Applications	Approved	Payment Claims Received	Paid
<3ha *	230	127	33	26
3-10ha	351	299	48	28
10-20ha	1127	997	163	113
20-30ha	1604	1409	258	196
30-50ha	3696	3225	724	525
50-100ha	4874	4193	1029	747
>100ha	1632	1340	267	185
Totals	13514	11590	2522	1820

*Includes applications from Intensive Enterprises which qualify by having more than 20 production units.

Departmental Budgets

229. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding that has been allocated to programmes (details supplied) in 2018. [45398/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In this year's Budget I have secured €107m in capital funding for energy efficiency schemes in 2018, a 34% increase. This capital increase is complemented by an increased current expenditure allocation that will allow the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to support the expansion of our highly successful energy efficiency schemes bringing the total allocation for energy efficiency schemes to €117m. Of this €107m in capital funding, at this point I expect to allocate approximately €84m to domestic energy efficiency programmes, €9m to energy efficiency projects in the public sector and the remaining €14m to energy efficiency schemes aimed at farms, small businesses and commercial enterprises. A further breakdown of these figures is not available pending announcements on the operation of individual SEAI schemes in 2018. These figures will be confirmed in the Revised Estimates for Public Services, which I understand will be published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in December.

Departmental Expenditure

230. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's expenditure in 2017 by subhead. [45399/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's 2017 budgetary allocation amounts to €540.3 million, comprising €183.1 million for capital investments and €357.2 million for current spending, spread across six programme areas. The following tables set out details of combined capital and current expenditure to end September 2017, at individual subhead level by programme area. In summary, total capital and current expenditure at end September amounted to €88.6m and €251.7m respectively.

Programme A - Communications

Subhead	REV 2017 Allocation	2017 Provisional Outturn
	€000	Expenditure to 30/9/2017
	€000	€000
A.1 - Administration - Pay	4,934	3,184
A.2 - Administration - Non-Pay	1,846	792
A.3 - Information and Communications Technology Programme	20,490	8,800
A.4 - Multimedia Developments	5,176	3,534
A.5 - Information Society	6,964	2,951
A.6 - Other capital (including capital contingency)	500	-
Total	39,910	19,261

Programme B - Broadcasting

Questions - Written Answers

Subhead	REV 2017 Allocation	2017 Provisional Outturn
	€000	€000
B.1 - Administration - Pay	995	643
B.2 - Administration - Non-Pay	619	266
B.3 - Grant to Radio Telefís Éireann for Broadcasting Licence Fees	190,724	135,434
B.4 - Payment to An Post for collection of Broadcasting Licence Fees	12,457	8,004
B.5 - Deontas i Leith Theilfis na Gaeilge	33,710	29,833
B.6 - Broadcasting Fund	14,704	10,277
B.7 - RTE Spectrum	8,000	5,160
Total	261,209	189,616

Programme C – Energy

Subhead	REV 2017 Allocation	2017 Provisional Outturn
	€000	€000
C.1 - Administration - Pay	5,070	3,272
C.2 - Administration - Non-Pay	2,164	934
C.3 - Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland - Administration and General Expenses	9,430	6,740
C.4 - Sustainable Energy Programmes (including capital carryover)	98,341	52,302
C.5 - Energy Research Programmes	7,607	2,572
C.7 - Gas Services	32	9
C.8 - Subscriptions to International Organisations	290	129
Total	122,934	65,957

Programme D - Natural Resources

Subhead	REV 2017 Allocation	2017 Provisional Outturn
	€000	€000
D.1 - Administration - Pay	6,383	4,119
D.2 - Administration - Non-Pay	3,453	1,470
D.3 - Petroleum Services	441	-
D.4 - Mining Services	3,700	724
D.5 - GSI Services	12,084	7,355
D.8 - Subscriptions to International Organisations	135	17
Total	26,196	13,685

Programme E - Inland Fisheries

Subhead	REV 2017 Allocation	2017 Provisional Outturn
	€000	€000
E.1 - Administration - Pay	905	584
E.2 - Administration - Non-Pay	413	179

Subhead		2017 Provisional Outturn
	REV 2017 Allocation	Expenditure to 30/9/2017
	€000	€000
E.3 - Inland Fisheries	29,283	17,889
Total	30,601	18,653

Programme F - Environment and Waste Management

Subhead		2017 Provisional Outturn
	REV 2017 Allocation	Expenditure to 30/9/2017
	€000	€000
F.1 - Admin Pay	4,345	2,804
F.2 - Admin Non Pay	2,112	758
F.3 - Environmental Protection Agency(including capital carryover)	31,509	23,059
F.4 - Carbon Fund	800	431
F.4 - International Climate Change Commitments	2,500	-
F.6 - Landfill Remediation	11,000	2,921
F.7 - Technical Research and Modelling	1,750	342
F.8 - Subscriptions to International Organisations	3,000	2,646
F.9 - National Dialogue	350	-
F.10 - Waste Campaign	1,600	240
F.11 - Other Services	547	-
Total	59,513	33,202

Energy Prices

231. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the additional measures he is planning on taking in 2018 to reduce energy costs for consumers. [45401/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The overarching energy objective of successive Governments has been to ensure secure and sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. As outlined in the Energy White Paper, Government policy is to ensure that policy choices impacting energy costs are evidence-based with a focus on competitiveness, cost-benefit, security and sustainability. The electricity and gas markets are commercial and deregulated operating within national and European regulatory regimes. I have no statutory function in the monitoring or setting of gas or electricity prices.

Responsibility for the regulation of the gas or electricity markets is a matter for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), which is an independent statutory body.

At a national level, the deregulated energy market results in choices for consumers and businesses in terms of suppliers, products and prices. I would encourage consumers to either switch supplier or to contact their current supplier to ensure that the best available deal is being provided. Two CRU approved websites, www.bonkers.ie and www.switcher.ie, are very helpful in aiding consumers to choose the products that best suit their needs and assisting them to switch energy suppliers.

CRU carries out statutory market monitoring functions and has the responsibility to ensure

the market operates competitively for the benefit of the consumer. It also conducts regulatory scrutiny of the network costs component of retail prices.

Energy efficiency supports also represent a significant opportunity for consumers and businesses to reduce their energy costs. The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) provides the policy framework for energy efficiency in Ireland. Energy efficiency supports are available via the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), to assist both business and domestic energy consumers, with significant funding allocated to them.

In the recent Budget, I secured approximately €107 million in capital funding for energy efficiency schemes in 2018, a 34% increase on the 2017 allocation. The capital increase will allow the SEAI to support the expansion of energy efficiency schemes. This will mean that 28,500 homes will be upgraded, including 9,000 low income households, and that bills for homes and business will be reduced by approximately €26 million, with 483 gigawatt hours of energy saved and 120,000 tonnes of carbon emissions saved.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

232. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes that are in the light blue areas of the national broadband plan map that have been connected since the initiation of this phase of the plan, by county. [45402/17]

233. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes in the amber area of the national broadband plan that are awaiting internet connections. [45403/17]

234. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the implementation status of the national broadband plan. [45404/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232, 233 and 234 together.

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 telecommunications 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 it is expected that 90% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband.

My Department's High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, categorises premises into 3 colours.

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the parts of the country that will require State Intervention to access high speed broadband. There are approximately 540,000 premises in this area.

- The BLUE areas are where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- LIGHT BLUE areas are part of eir's planned rural deployment of high speed broadband to 300,000 premises.

The procurement process to identify a bidder(s) for the State Intervention or AMBER area is

well underway, having moved to its final stages in September with the submission of “Detailed Solutions” by two bidders.

In April, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the roll-out by the end of 2018. Information on eir’s planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

Evaluation by my Department of the Q3 update for eir’s rural deployment is at an advanced stage and indicates that eir has met its Q3 target of 101,000 premises passed. County by county statistics are available on my Department’s website for Q2 and can be viewed at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/County%20Statistics.pdf>. The statistics for Q3 will be published on my Department’s website in the coming weeks.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

235. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for broadband services to be available in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the position regarding fibre installation; the position regarding the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45412/17]

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 telecommunications 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 it is expected that 90% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband. In April, eir signed an agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to an additional 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period with an average of 500 premises passed per day. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department’s website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k roll-out will be published on my Department’s website available at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/County%20Statistics.pdf> which includes a full set of county statistics. eir has confirmed to my Department that 101,000 premises have been passed as at the end of September 2017. The 300,000 figure includes c.7,800 premises in County Cavan and c.4,600 in County Monaghan. eir will continue to roll-out high speed broadband to the remaining premises including those premises in Counties Cavan and Monaghan 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 shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services. Individuals can search the map by entering their eircode/address.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services and includes eir’s planned 300k rural deployment depicted Light BLUE

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will be part of the State led Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

The position in relation to the areas referred to by the Deputy is set out below:

There are c. 42,000 premises in County Cavan, of which c17,000 will benefit from the State led Intervention under the NBP. The remaining c25,000 premises are located in the commercial BLUE area and will be served by commercial operators. This figure includes the c7,800 premises that fall within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018 (Light BLUE on map).

There are c33,000 premises In Co Monaghan, of which c16,000 premises will benefit from the State led Intervention under the NBP. The remaining c17,000 premises are located in the commercial BLUE area and will be served by commercial operators. This figure includes the c4,600 premises that fall within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018 (Light BLUE on map).

My Department is engaged in an on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out the 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 progression to the appointment of a preferred bidder(s). The timeframe for completion of the State Intervention procurement process is dependent on a range of factors, including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders.

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 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 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 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

236. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the fibre roll-out programme in rural townlands that are outside fibre serviced towns, specifically Bolart, Kilmanaghan, Ballyboughlin, Cloughtanny, Ballycumber, Kilfoylan, Tubber, Kilcurley, Tinamuck and Boher, County Offaly; if fibre will be delivered to these areas; and the date on which it will be delivered. [45508/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In April of this year, I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The 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 under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). The Map is colour coded AMBER for areas to be covered by the State led Intervention under the NBP and BLUE for areas where commercial operators are delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed

broadband services. Light BLUE areas on the Map represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll-out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of an Agreement signed with me in April last. The Map is searchable by eircode.

The map shows that 100% of the townlands of Bolart North, Bolart South, Kilmanaghan, Ballyboughlin, Tinamuck East, Tinamuck South and Tinamuck North County Offaly fall exclusively within the areas of the State led Intervention under the NBP.

The remaining townlands Cloughtanny, Ballycumber, Kilfoylan, Tober (Tubber), Kilcurley and Botharfadda (Boher) comprise a mix of premises to be covered by either eir's plans to provide a new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises, or the State led intervention under the NBP and are colour coded accordingly. eir has confirmed to my Department that 101,000 premises have been passed as at the end of September 2017. eir will continue to roll-out high speed broadband between now and the end of 2018 to the remaining premises including those premises that fall within the said townlands. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

Customers seeking connectivity to eir's network should, in the first instance, access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

With regard to the State led Intervention, my Department is engaged in an on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network. A significant milestone in that procurement process was reached last month 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). My Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy for the network build on conclusion of this process.

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 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 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 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.

Energy Policy

237. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45520/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The overarching objective of Government energy policy is to ensure a secure,

sustainable supply of competitively priced energy for all consumers. As outlined in the Energy White Paper, it is Government policy to ensure policy choices impacting energy costs are evidence-based with a focus on competitiveness, cost-benefit, security and sustainability. The electricity and gas markets are commercial and deregulated operating within national and European regulatory regimes. I have no statutory function in the monitoring or setting of gas or electricity prices - that is the responsibility of the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) as the independent statutory energy regulator. CRU is responsible for ensuring the market operates competitively for the benefit of the consumer. At a national level, the electricity and gas retail markets provide choice for consumers, including businesses, in terms of suppliers, products and prices. I would encourage consumers to switch supplier or to contact their current supplier to ensure that the best available deal is being provided. Energy efficiency offers very significant potential for business to reduce their energy spend and enhance competitiveness. There are already a range of supports available to large energy users and to SME's and information on these is available on the SEAI website at <https://www.seai.ie/energy-in-business/>.

In addition, I have secured significant additional resources for energy efficiency in Budget 2018. €14m will be used to enhance energy efficiency supports for the commercial sector in 2018. To ensure such funding continues to meet the needs of commercial energy users, my Department is currently engaging with business organisations through an open public consultation. Details are available on my Department's website at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/energy/consultations/Pages/Commercial-Energy-Efficiency-Survey.aspx>. The consultation is open until 3 November.

Committee of Public Accounts

238. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to have a company (details supplied) subjected to the remit of the Committee of Public Accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45521/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have no function in relation to the remit of the Public Accounts Committee. The company referred to by the Deputy is a commercial State body and is not funded by the Exchequer and therefore not subject to the PAC. The PAC has previously contacted me in relation to concerns raised by a Local Authority regarding expenditure by EirGrid and I responded outlining EirGrid's position as a commercial State body which is regulated in its activities by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities.

North-South Interconnector

239. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on correspondence from a local authority (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45522/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Monaghan County Council raised this matter earlier in the year with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) who in turn raised it directly with me. I have informed the PAC that EirGrid is a commercial State body charged with the implementation of Government energy policy and guarantee a secure supply of electricity via the development of the Irish electricity transmission system. This involves the maintenance, improvement and technological upgrade of the network. As a commercial body, EirGrid is not funded by the Exchequer and therefore,

not subject to the PAC. This position applies to all commercial state bodies under the remit of my Department. EirGrid is regulated in its activities by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), the independent regulator for the sector. The CRU has the role of approving the overall level of investment in transmission infrastructure. It approves expenditure on the transmission grid when EirGrid submits its Transmission Development Plan, which outlines EirGrid's plans for transmission network development on a five-year rolling basis, to the CRU for approval. The entire capital expenditure for 2017 for example is regulated and is consistent with the multi-annual allowance as provided in the relevant regulatory determinations.

Litter Pollution Legislation

240. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce legislation to compel election candidates to remove plastic ties that hold election posters in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45554/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Section 19(7) of the Litter Pollution Act 1997, as amended by the Electoral (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 2009, provides that election posters must be taken down within 7 days of an election taking place. Prior to each general election, my Department writes to all participating political parties to remind them of their obligations under the Litter Pollution Acts, and requesting them to remove both the posters and the cable ties used to attach them within the statutory timeframe. Should this requirement not be met, there is deemed to be a breach of the legislation and those responsible may be subject to an on-the-spot litter fine of €150. Under the Acts, the primary responsibility for the management and enforcement response to littering, including oversight of the removal of election posters and cable ties within the statutory timeframe, rests with the local authorities.

Employment Rights

241. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the pay terms and working conditions of crew and staff at an organisation (details supplied); if his Department has been contacted by persons with concerns on working conditions; the steps that have been taken to investigate such concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45356/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The pay terms and working conditions of the many people who work for Ryanair across Europe are a matter for the company and the employment authorities across Europe, including the Irish employment authorities. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has no function in relation to such matters.

Swimming Pool Programme Funding

242. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of additional funding allocated to sport from the allocation of €1,258 million under the mid-term capital review up to 2021; his plans to reintroduce the local authority swimming pool capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45382/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Bren-

dan Griffin): Later this year, the Government will be publishing the National Investment Plan alongside the National Planning Framework which will set out in detail the planned infrastructure priorities over the coming years including those in the sports area. Furthermore, full details on the allocations for each of my Department's subheads for 2018 will be set out, as usual, in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV).

The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) provides grant aid to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools.

There are four swimming pool projects in the current LASPP and the priority in 2018 will be 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. It is expected that the new sports policy will be published before the end of the year.

Travel Trade Sector

243. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a company (details supplied) was underbonded in view of the fact the company had a turnover of €20 million per annum and was bonded with the Commission for Aviation Regulation for €2.5 million. [45397/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The responsibility for administering the licensing and bonding of travel agents and tour operators in accordance with the Transport (Tour Operators and Travel Agents) Act, 1982 as amended, was transferred to the Commission for Aviation Regulation on 27 February, 2001. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Commission for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

244. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application by a club (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45433/17]

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. I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to.

When the programme was launched, it was envisaged that €30m would be available which would have made the allocation of grants particularly challenging. Following the conclusion of the budget discussions and in order to allow as many worthwhile projects as possible to receive some funding, I am pleased that significant extra resources have been secured to allocate under this round.

The assessment of all the 2,320 applications is now nearing completion and I expect to be in

a position to announce full details of the allocations in the coming weeks.

Tourism Promotion

245. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consultation process undertaken regarding the establishment of a new Lakelands brand with the stakeholders; and the timeframe and amount sought by Fáilte Ireland at the conclusion of the consultation process. [45533/17]

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. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland and I do not have a direct role in relation to the development of branding strategies.

As the consultation for the development of a new Lakelands brand is a matter for Fáilte Ireland, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply in relation to the process involved.

While a draft proposal has been submitted to my Department, Fáilte Ireland is currently developing a more detailed proposal for this project. This proposal, which I expect to receive in December, is subject to an economic analysis, which will guide consideration of the level of investment required.

Bus Éireann Services

246. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures that will be implemented to ensure improvements on routes operated by Bus Éireann in which concerns have been brought to the attention of his Department (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45562/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

247. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to implement measures in order that upgrades will be carried out to ensure the safe and constant access to Cobh, County Cork; and if his attention has been drawn to the hardship that was suffered by the persons that reside there with regard to accessibility during Storm Ophelia. [45598/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area, is a statutory function of each road authority 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 initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded from these monies is a matter for each local authority. The Department has not received a recent submis-

sion in relation to access to Cobh.

Statutory Instruments

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he consulted farming organisations in advance of issuing SI No. 413 of 2017 on road testing of tractors and the impact this would have on farmers. [45614/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Directive 2014/45/EU on periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers, requires, from 20 May 2018, the mandatory periodic testing of tractors with a maximum design speed exceeding 40 km/h (category T5), and which are used mainly on the public road for commercial road haulage purposes. There is however, no requirement on Member States to introduce compulsory testing for T5 tractors when being used for agricultural, horticultural, forestry, farming or fishery purposes mainly on the terrain where such activity takes place.

There is no requirement for a public consultation process when transposing mandatory EU Directives. However, the RSA will be engaging with affected stakeholders to provide them with guidance in relation to the practical implementation of its requirements.

Early Childhood Care and Education

249. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will grant a second preschool year under the ECCE scheme for a person (details supplied) who is only marginally over the age limit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45447/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Early Childhood and Education Programme (ECCE) programme was expanded from September 2016 so that children may start free pre-school from age 3, and can continue in free pre-school once the child is not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the relevant pre-school year. Currently there are three different points in the year - September, January and April.

Under Budget 2018, the ECCE programme has been expanded further so that all eligible children can avail of a full two programme year. There will also only be one enrolment point each year (i.e September). However, I must advise the Deputy that these will not come into effect until September 2018.

An upper age limit in free pre-school was set by the Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment on the advice of the Department of Education and Skills. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in primary school is considered to be generally in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs does its best to ensure, in so far as is possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied in a fair manner. The rules for all the Department's childcare schemes are clearly published to ensure transparency and consistent application. An essential component of the scheme's rules is an eligibility date to ensure that the scheme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

For the programme year 2017/2018 parents may request an exemption from ECCE eligibility criteria under limited circumstances from my Department; specifically where a diagnosed

special and/or medical need exists. This must be supported by a letter from a relevant medical specialist, recommending additional time in pre-school. However, please be aware that my Department is currently reviewing the overage exemption process. I would urge the parents of the child in question to contact my Department to enquire about such an exemption.

Leader Programmes Data

250. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the expenditure on projects under the Leader programme in each of the years 2014 to 2020 as of 30 September 2017; the approvals for projects to the same day by local action group; the steps being taken to expedite expenditure under the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45358/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual EU co-funded programme to support rural development. Ireland has an allocation of €250 million under the programme over the period 2014-2020, including both national and EU funding. The programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been produced for each LAG area.

Funding Agreements for the current LEADER programme were, for the most part, signed with the LAGs in the second half of 2016 and the programme effectively became operational from that date. There was no project expenditure on the new LEADER programme prior to 2017, although funding was provided to the LAGs to develop their Local Development Strategies and to prepare for the implementation phase of the programme.

In excess of 5,000 expressions of interest have been received to date by the LAGs from potential project promoters under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme and the LAGs are currently working with project promoters to develop and finalise project applications.

As of 30th September 2017, 345 projects with a value of over €8.7 million have been approved for LEADER funding by the LAGs. The number and value of projects at final approved stage in each Local Action Group is provided in Appendix 1. This funding will be drawn down as projects start to incur expenditure and submit payment claims. As of 30th September 2017, project expenditure amounting to €140,106.25 had been drawn down.

Progress has continued in October, with over 400 projects now fully approved for LEADER grant aid of over €10 million. This compares to projects with a LEADER grant aid of less than €1 million approved in the first 6 months of the year.

I am confident that progress now being made by the LAGs, along with the administrative changes being introduced following on from the LEADER Forum hosted earlier in the year, will result in a significant increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme over the coming months.

Appendix 1 – Projects at Final Approved stage in each LAG at 30 September 2017

LAG Area	Number of Projects	Leader Grant Amount (€)
Carlow	9	608,336.16
Cavan	6	139,719.27
Clare	29	529,259.00
Cork North	0	0.00

Questions - Written Answers

LAG Area	Number of Projects	Leader Grant Amount (€)
Cork South	1	15,496.70
Cork West	1	10,000.00
Donegal	32	1,025,173.46
Dublin	5	60,509.61
Galway East	0	0.00
Galway West	0	0.00
Kerry	90	1,514,135.32
Kildare	0	0.00
Kilkenny	21	477,620.98
Laois	5	63,319.50
Leitrim	0	0.00
Limerick	3	14,794.29
Longford	5	20,476.57
Louth	6	43,561.54
Mayo	14	513,663.92
Meath	5	44,206.66
Monaghan	4	178,431.18
Offaly	33	616,561.44
Roscommon	7	162,602.61
Sligo	21	503,081.26
Tipperary	11	283,934.88
Waterford	12	1,409,419.65
Westmeath	14	186,496.42
Wexford	11	377,738.10
Wicklow	0	0.00
TOTAL	345	8,798,538.52

Grant Payments

251. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there is grant assistance available towards the provision of electricity supply to an outlying shed or farm building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45417/17]

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.

Rural Social Scheme Data

252. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of positions filled to date in 2017 out of the 500 additional places provided for the rural social scheme in 2017 to each company and Údarás na Gaeltachta delivering the scheme, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45357/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) is delivered through 35 Implementing Bodies (IBs) or Local Development Companies and Údarás Na Gaeltachta in the Gaeltacht areas.

RSS was established as a supplementary income support scheme which provides part-time employment opportunities in community and voluntary organisations for farmers or fishermen who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and underemployed in their primary occupation. Participants must continue to be actively farming/fishing and retain entitlement to a qualifying DEASP payment in order to retain eligibility for participation on RSS.

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 provided on the RSS. These additional places expanded the overall number of places available from 2,600 to 3,100. In addition, I am pleased to confirm that a further 250 places on the RSS have been made available in Budget 2018. This will bring the total number of places on the RSS to 3,350 for 2018. Work is commencing in my Department on the allocation of these new places.

The following table outlines the number of RSS positions from the allocation of 500 places announced in Budget 2017, filled in each Implementing body at the end of September 2017.

RSS Implementing Body	Places filled at 30th Sept 2017
Ballyhoura Development Limited	6
Co Sligo Leader Partnership Company	10
Donegal Local Development Co Ltd	19
South & East Cork Area Development	5
Galway Rural Development Co Ltd	27
Inishowen Rural Development Ltd	4
IRD Duhallow Ltd	0
Longford Community Resources	3
South Kerry Development Part CLG	14
South West Mayo Development Co Ltd	24
Waterford Leader Partnership Ltd	1
West Limerick Resources	4
Westmeath Community Development Ltd	5
Údarás na Gaeltachta	1
Avondu Blackwater Partnership Ltd	2
Breffni Integrated Ltd	0
Carlow Co Development Part Ltd	0
Cill Dara ar Aghaidh Teo	2
Clare Local Dev Co Ltd	25
Co Wicklow Community Partnership	3
Comhar na nOileán Teo.	4
County Kilkenny Leader Partnership	0
Forum Connemara Ltd	8
Laois Community & Enterprise Dev Co	0
Leitrim Integrated Dev Co Ltd	6
Louth Community Resources	1
Meath Community Rural & Social Dev	4
Monaghan Integrated Development Ltd	0
Nth & East Kerry Leader Part Teo	9
Mayo Nth East Leader Part Co Teo	4

RSS Implementing Body	Places filled at 30th Sept 2017
North Tipperary Leader Partnership	1
Offaly Integrated Local Dev Co Ltd	5
Roscommon Integrated Dev Co Ltd	0
South Tipperary Development Co	5
West Cork Development Part Ltd	6
Wexford Local Development Ltd	0
Total	208

Fuel Allowance Applications

253. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for fuel allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45392/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fuel allowance is a means tested payment to assist those in receipt of long-term social welfare payments towards meeting their heating costs during the winter months. The payment is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

Eligibility for fuel allowance is subject to a household means test and other qualifying conditions. A person in receipt of state pension (contributory) may have a combined household income of up to €100.00 per week over and above the maximum weekly rate of state pension (contributory) and must be living alone or with other qualified persons.

A fuel application form was received from the person concerned on 11 October 2017.

On 23 October 2017, additional information on household means was requested from the person concerned to facilitate a decision on entitlement being made.

On receipt of this information a decision on fuel allowance entitlement will be made and the person concerned notified without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

254. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expected publication date of the report on pension inequities agreed to by the former Minister for Social Protection during the passing of the Social Welfare Bill 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45393/17]

255. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the actions she will take if the report on pension inequities agreed to by the former Minister for Social Protection finds that the changes introduced to bands in 2012 had an adverse effect on pensioners and women pensioners in particular; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45394/17]

256. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to address the anomalies in the calculation of the contributory pension before 2020 in view of the fact that the system is scheduled to move from an averaging approach to a total contributions approach; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45395/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 to 256, inclusive, together.

The average pension payments made by my Department to men and women over 66 years of age are within 1% of each other approximately, and this results in very similar outcomes for older men and women in avoiding poverty. The most recent CSO figures for Consistent Poverty indicated that 2.6% of women over 65, and 2.9% of men over 65, are in consistent poverty, which is less than a third that of the general population. Eurostat figures also show that men and women over 65 are less likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland than in the EU as a whole, with the gap in outcomes between men and women being significantly narrower in Ireland than most countries.

I intend to publish a Pensions Reform Plan by the end of this year. The aim of the planned reforms will be to establish a sound and fit for purpose overall pension system for the coming decades, one that is sustainable and which will shape the retirement landscape to the benefit of our retirees for generations to come. One of the main components of that Plan will be the introduction of a Total Contributions Approach for the contributory pension to replace the yearly average approach, for new pensioners from about 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. This is a very big change and there are a lot of legal, administrative, and technical elements to put in place before it can be done. Its aim is to provide as fair a basis as possible for the calculation of contributory pensions while removing the anomalies of the existing system. Key to the design of this new approach will be the position of women who have gaps in their contribution records as a result of caring duties.

Officials in my Department are currently examining data from the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund, which was finalised recently. Following completion of this analysis, it is intended to have a public consultation on this reform, and this will provide an opportunity for people to submit their views on the priorities in this reform. Following this consultation process, proposals on the final details of the scheme will be made to the Government. This, in turn, will result in legislation being prepared for consideration by the Oireachtas.

As regards the specific matter of the post-2012 rate bands, I have asked my Department to prepare a report for me on the issue as soon as possible to see what options are open to improving the outcomes for those whose contributory entitlements are lower as a result of that change. I will be bringing the report to Government as soon as it is ready. However, the Deputy should bear in mind that the cost of simply reverting to the rate bands from 2000-2012 would be very expensive, would generally increase payments to better-off pensioners with additional means, and would reduce resources available to the broader group of pensioners. The recent Budget contained increases to the rate of the payment for pensions would not have been feasible if such a reversal of the 2012 changes had also been included, and that would have impacted negatively upon the most vulnerable pensioners, including those with no additional means, and widows and widowers living alone with only one pension payment.

It should be remembered that, where somebody does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they will generally qualify for an alternative payment, unless they have significant additional means. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult amounting up to up to 90% of a full rate pension, which is based on their own means and is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested non-contributory State pension which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate, based on a household means test.

Most pensioners would satisfy the means tests for these two payments, and the very large

majority of people paid them receive the maximum rate. Therefore, it would seem that those in receipt of SPC payments at a lower rate are among the better off pensioners who have significant additional means, over and above state supports.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit Data

257. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of the additional maternity leave and benefit for mothers of premature babies who are currently on maternity leave but the children of which were born before 1 October 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45396/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection does not collect data on the number of mothers with premature babies born before 1 October 2017 who are currently on maternity leave as this information was not necessary to make a decision on an application for maternity benefit prior to 1 October 2017. In this context the cost associated with allowing mothers of premature babies born before 1 October 2017 who are currently on maternity leave additional maternity leave and benefit, as outlined by the Deputy, is not available.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

258. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to provide a pension scheme to supervisors and assistant supervisors in community employment schemes as recommended by the Labour Court; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45405/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector. The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for such employees even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. It is open to individuals to make provision for a pension by way of PRSA which all employers are obliged to facilitate. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the issue of CE supervisors' pension provision is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department is represented on this group, as are IMPACT, SIPTU, Pobal and other relevant Government Departments. I understand their work is ongoing and that the Forum is due to meet again in early November 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

259. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is eligible to receive fuel allowance. [45446/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy may be aware Section 1.6.5 Employment Support Schemes, of the Fuel Allowance Scheme Guidelines for the 2017/2018 Fuel Season Onwards, provides that "Participants on the

following Department of Social Protection Employment Support Schemes and Revenue Job Assist can be paid Fuel Allowance where they had applied for or were awarded fuel allowance prior to commencing on the scheme and where they satisfy or continue to satisfy the conditions.

- Back to Education Allowance
- Back to Work Enterprise Allowance/Short-term Enterprise Allowance
- Community Employment
- Gateway - the local authority social employment scheme
- National Internship Scheme (JobBridge)
- Rural Social Scheme
- Tús Community Work Placement Scheme

Section 1.6.5 further provides that “Claimants moving to an Employment Support Scheme cannot accrue entitlement to Fuel Allowance while on the scheme.”

The person concerned was not recently granted fuel allowance. He commenced on a community employment scheme on 02-05-2015 and has not previously received fuel allowance whilst on the scheme. Nor did he prior to his commencement whilst on jobseekers allowance, therefore he does not have an entitlement to fuel allowance per guidelines.

However, a letter issued to the person concerned, from their local Intreo Centre, which incorrectly stated that they did have an entitlement to fuel allowance. This error was noticed by the Community Services manager and the relevant staff notified. The Intreo Centre manager wishes to apologise for the error that was made and any inconvenience this may have caused the person concerned. This error does not, however, bestow an entitlement where none exists.

The Department are satisfied that the correct decision was made in this instance.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

260. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to change the rules governing the fuel allowance scheme to allow persons on a rural social scheme who hold an underlying entitlement to fuel allowance to apply for this payment after they have commenced on a RSS; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45528/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a means tested payment, targeted at those who are more vulnerable to energy poverty, including those reliant on social protection payments for longer periods and who are unlikely to have additional resources of their own.

Participants on the rural social scheme (RSS) can be paid Fuel Allowance where they had applied for - or were awarded the payment - prior to commencing on the scheme and where continue to satisfy the conditions.

For the 2016/17 fuel season, the eligibility criteria for the allowance was changed. As a

result, a participant in an employment support scheme (which includes the RSS), who had an underlying entitlement to fuel allowance prior to participation on the scheme but was not in receipt of the allowance because another member of the household was receiving it, could apply if these circumstances change (e.g. a social welfare fuel recipient is no longer residing at the address). The fuel allowance can be reviewed and awarded provided the employment support scheme participant satisfies all conditions for receipt of fuel allowance.

Any decision to extend the eligibility criteria for fuel allowance to allow persons on the RSS to accrue entitlement to the allowance while on the scheme would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

261. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45564/17]

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 10 October 2017. The application was processed without delay and the person concerned was notified directly of the outcome on 25 October 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance payment will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) whose payment has been terminated on the basis of nominal savings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45571/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of the entitlement of this lady's disability allowance (DA), it was disallowed with effect from 25 October 2017 as she was deemed to have means in excess of the statutory limit for her circumstances. The person in question has been advised of her right to appeal this decision to the social welfare appeals office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Data

263. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of extending social protection supports to the self-employed in a full calendar year and permitting such persons to opt into the existing class A structure broken down by costs of extending, invalidity, illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefit based on the 2015 actuarial review of the social insurance fund. [45589/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Self-employed workers who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year, are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum annual payment of €500. This provides them with access to the following benefits: State pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory), guardian's payment (contributory), maternity benefit, adoptive benefit, paternity benefit, treatment benefit (from March 2017). Entitlement to invalidity pension will be extended to the self-employed from December 2017.

This compares favourably with employees who, in general, are liable to the Class A rate of 4%. In addition their employers are liable to PRSI at the rate of 8.5% on weekly earnings up to and including €376 or at the rate of 10.75% where weekly earnings exceed €376. Accordingly the combined rate of PRSI rate paid in respect of Class A employees is 12.5% or 14.75%, depending on the level of weekly earnings. These Class A employees are entitled to the full range of social insurance benefits.

The issue of extending additional social insurance benefits to the self-employed paying Class S PRSI was considered in the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance fund (SIF) as at 31 December, 2015, which I published on the 18th October 2017. The review, required by legislation, was carried out by independent consultants, KPMG. It examines the projected income and expenditure of the SIF over the course of the 55 year period from 2016 to 2071.

The review found that the fund currently has a modest surplus of income over expenditure. In 2016 there was a surplus of €0.4 billion on expenditure of €8.8 billion and receipts of €9.2 billion. However, this will reduce over the next two years and will return to a small shortfall in 2020. The annual shortfalls are projected to increase from 2021 onwards as the ageing of the population impacts. Projections indicate that, in the absence of further action to tackle the shortfall, the excess of expenditure over income of the fund will increase significantly over the medium to long term. The shortfall in expenditure over income is projected to increase from €0.2 billion in 2020 to €3.3 billion by 2030 and to €22.2 billion by 2071. It should be noted that as self-employed workers will be eligible to apply for invalidity pension from December 2017, the cost of this introduction has been factored into the actuarial review.

As part of the review the independent consultants were required to project the additional PRSI expenditure if invalidity pension and illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits were extended to Class S self-employed workers and the PRSI contribution rates required to provide these benefits on a revenue neutral basis.

The review found that the combined cost of introducing the invalidity, illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits for class S contributions is estimated to be €118 million in 2018, rising steadily to €223 million in 2020. By 2025 the projected cost is €413 million and, over the period of the review the cost would rise to €1.3 billion in 2071. These costs assume that the cost of extending invalidity pension to the self-employed builds up steeply for the first 10 years after introduction after which time the scheme is almost at maturity or a steady state.

For the shorter term schemes, illness and jobseeker's benefits, it is estimated that they will reach maturity after 2 years. Projected expenditure on jobseeker's benefit assume the same incidence rate as prevail in the employed (PRSI Class A) population.

The review indicates that, where these benefits are extended to the self-employed, the class S rate of PRSI contribution would need to increase substantially in order to ensure that the benefits are delivered in a revenue neutral manner. It estimates that when expenditure on the additional benefits is considered over the entire projection period, PRSI rates would need to increase by 94% under a scenario of no subvention from the exchequer. This is equivalent to an increase of the Class S contribution rate from the current 4% rate to 7.8%.

This increased contribution is attributable to the costs of extending these additional benefits to PRSI Class S contributors. It does not take account of the value to PRSI Class S contributors of access to the range of existing benefits, and in particular state pension contributory.

The consultants estimated that the typical cost of state pension (contributory) on its own is of the order of 10% to 15%, depending on other factors including rate of average earnings and date of commencing paying PRSI. Adding in the other benefits referenced the total Class S rate of contribution to ensure revenue neutrality would be of the order of 20% per annum.

The projections provided in the 2015 actuarial review are based on the system of social insurance, currently in legislation. It therefore reflects the fact that social insurance applies on a compulsory basis and not on the basis of allowing contributors to opt in at their own discretion.

The issue of whether social insurance cover for the self-employed should be made on a compulsory or voluntary basis was addressed in the third report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare published in 2013. The then Advisory Group was charged with examining extending social insurance coverage for self-employed people in order to establish whether or not such cover is technically feasible and financially sustainable. The group considered that allowing people a facility to opt in or out at their own discretion could lead to the selection of bad risks.

The fundamental principle of social insurance is social solidarity. Everybody contributes and, if needed, cover for contingencies is available. Allowing people to opt in or opt out could result in a negation of the social solidary contributory principles which underline the system. In addition, it would be likely to mean that a higher contribution would be required from those who opt in on a voluntary basis.

National Planning Framework

264. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address concerns regarding aspects of the national framework plan that are creating uncertainty for local authority funding streams particularly in rural areas. [45540/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am not aware of any aspects of the recently published final consultation draft of the National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 – Our Plan, that would have any adverse implications for the funding streams of local authorities, particularly in rural areas.

On the contrary, through alignment with the forthcoming 10-year Capital Investment Plan, I believe that the NPF will be of considerable benefit to local authorities, both urban and rural, in setting out a co-ordinated strategic development framework for the development of the country as a whole, and 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.

Moreover, the draft Framework includes practical planning, development and investment policies which will benefit rural Ireland by driving planned and community-led regeneration initiatives, aimed at re-purposing rural economies to benefit from new technology, driving economic activities and improved quality of life.

Submissions on the final consultation draft of the NPF are invited until Friday 3rd November, after which the Government intends to address such submissions and finalise the Framework along with the 10-year capital investment plan by year-end. I would encourage all inter-

ested parties to engage in this consultative process and share their views on any relevant issues.

Local Government Reform

265. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the review of local government constituencies and a review of local government structures as outlined in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45569/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of requirements in relation to local government reform. This involves the submission of a report to Government and the Oireachtas on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy. The Programme also references some specific issues to be considered such as the concept of directly elected mayors in cities, devolution of new powers to local authorities, reducing the size of local electoral areas, and town council status.

Work on the report is at an advanced stage. The process of consultation with relevant stakeholders, as required by the Programme for Partnership Government, is under way and I hope to be in a position to have a report available for consideration by Government in the coming weeks. It is intended that the review of local electoral areas will commence very shortly and will be completed in good time before the 2019 local elections.

Commercial Property

266. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to address the level of commercial property vacancies in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43365/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 182 on 12 October 2017. I understand that Tipperary County Council has a number of local initiatives in place to address commercial property vacancies. Further details in this regard can be obtained directly from the Council.

Nitrates Usage

267. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to amend the regulations regarding slurry spreading to introduce greater flexibility as to when this practice is permitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41849/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with the Nitrates Directive, Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme is due for review this year. Negotiations with the European Commission are ongoing with a view to having a revised Nitrates Action Programme in place by the end of 2017.

As part of the review, a full public consultation process was undertaken and this closed on 3 May 2017. All submissions received on foot of this consultation have been given full consideration by an expert group comprising officials from my Department, the Department of Agri-

culture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and the Environmental Protection Agency. The report of the expert group, together with the group's recommendations, was recently published on my Department's website.

It would be inappropriate to comment on any specific aspects of the review process, or to anticipate any final outcomes, in advance of the conclusion of negotiations with the European Commission.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

268. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when invitations will be extended from local authorities for the second tranche of LIHAF following the allocation of a further €100 million to the scheme between exchequer and local authority funding; if existing applications under the first tranche will suffice; if not, if local authorities will have to submit fresh applications under the second tranche; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45383/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of Budget 2018, I announced an additional €50 million funding which will be available for a second call under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) and which will again be subject to matching funding of 25% by local authorities. This capital funding will facilitate the provision of more infrastructure to unlock further sites and activate more housing supply.

A further call for proposals under LIHAF is likely early in 2018 and it will be open to all local authorities to submit new projects or resubmit previous projects for consideration at that time.

Local Authority Housing Data

269. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of unoccupied houses awaiting acceptance of offer that each county council has on its stock book in tabular form. [45419/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for the local authority concerned, in accordance with its allocation scheme made in accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations. Therefore, my Department does not hold the information requested.

Traveller Accommodation

270. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of additional public Traveller accommodation units provided in 2016 and to date in 2017, by county, in tabular form; the Traveller accommodation budget allocations in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if his Department's target for Traveller accommodation units to be delivered in 2018 will meet its projected demand. [45453/17]

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.

The current round of TAPs were adopted in 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs.

Local authorities submit funding proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments (such as group housing schemes and halting sites) on an annual basis, which are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department. These proposals and assessments inform the capital allocation process. Provision of €12m has been made in Budget 2018 toward Traveller-specific accommodation. On receipt of all proposals, allocations for 2018 and the number of units to be delivered in all local authority areas will be finalised early next year. In addition, further funding allocations may be considered by my Department throughout the year, also on a case by case basis, in the light of progress across the programme generally and to ensure maximum drawdown of total funding allocated.

The allocations for 2016 and 2017 along with the number of units provided in 2016 and to date in 2017 are set out in the following tables

Council	Allocation 2016 €	Allocation 2017 €
Carlow	130,000	207,905.41
Cavan	8,600	13,729.31
Clare	200,000	169,194.00
Cork City	400,000	1,108,344.00
Cork County	30,000	110,000.00
Donegal	82,000	147,612.81
Dublin City	1,405,198	414,829.00
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	419,095	1,500,000.00
Fingal	26,842	26,847.00
South Dublin	63,000	1,024,289.00
Galway City	40,000	209,000.00
Galway County	117,000	625,000.00
Kerry	57,000	28,566.13
Kildare	200,000	80,000.00
Kilkenny	377,500	582,162.00
Laois	Nil	Nil
Leitrim	18,800	98,875.00
Limerick City & County	81,000	69,576.00
Longford	2,900	2,922.00
Louth	Nil	237,087.00
Mayo	Nil	Nil
Meath	120,000	129,000.00
Monaghan	Nil	Nil
Offaly	73,000	847,917.00
Roscommon	50,000	52,617.00
Sligo	Nil	161,249.00

Questions - Written Answers

Council	Allocation 2016 €	Allocation 2017 €
Tipperary	900,000	327,492.00
Waterford City & County	263,000	545,000.00
Westmeath	208,000	Nil
Wexford	96,000	6,880.00
Wicklow	46,000	52,648.00
TOTAL	5,414,935	8,778,742

Council	2016 Total Units	2017 Total Units (to date)
Carlow	0	3
Cavan	1	20
Clare	0	0
Cork City	3	0
Cork County	0	0
Donegal	1	0
Dublin City	9	8
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	1	4
Fingal	0	0
South Dublin	3	0
Galway City	1	0
Galway County	4	0
Kerry	3	26
Kildare	0	0
Kilkenny	8	1
Laois	0	0
Leitrim	2	0
Limerick City & County	2	0
Longford	0	0
Louth	10	0
Mayo	0	0
Meath	0	1
Monaghan	0	0
Offaly	1	1
Roscommon	1	0
Sligo	0	0
Tipperary	4	0
Waterford City & County	1	0
Westmeath	1	0
Wexford	3	0
Wicklow	0	2
TOTAL	59	66

Question No. 271 answered with Question No. 272.

Traveller Accommodation

271. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has instructed Galway City Council as a relevant housing authority under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 to amend or replace its accommodation pro-

gramme for the purpose of addressing the Traveller accommodation crisis in the city. [45454/17]

272. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action his Department will take in circumstances in which a local authority does not meet its responsibilities as set out in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. [45455/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

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. These are five-year rolling programmes, with the current programme running from 2014 to 2018, which provide a road map for housing authority investment priorities over the period. 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.

The Act also requires housing authorities to review their TAPs at least once in each three-year period, and to make any amendment to the programme following this review within seven months. Housing authorities were therefore required to carry out a review of the current round of TAPs no later than 31 December 2016, and all authorities did so. Following their review, Galway City Council has informed my Department that they adopted an amended TAP in September 2017.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

273. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of house loans approved by local authorities, by county, in the past three years; the number drawn down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45459/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are currently two house purchase loan offerings available to lower income first-time buyers from local authorities.

The first is a standard annuity mortgage available from all local authorities. A first-time buyer unable to get adequate loan finance from a building society or a bank, may be eligible for a mortgage from the local authority concerned to purchase a new or second hand property or build their own home in cases where the gross income (before tax) is €50,000 or less for a single income household or €75,000 or less in the case of a double income household. The loan can be up to 97% of the price of the house subject to a maximum loan of €200,000. The second option for first-time buyers unable to secure adequate loan finance from a bank or building society to purchase a new or second-hand property or build their own home is the Home Choice Loan. Home Choice Loan provides up to 92% of the market value of a property purchased, subject to a maximum loan amount of €285,000.

Information on the number of local authority loans approved and issued from 2014 to end Q2 2017 by county is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>.

I am currently examining the Home Choice Loan Scheme and am also considering how local authority mortgages can be better publicised to ensure that credit worthy households who may be unable to source adequate loan finance from commercial lenders but could be eligible for one of the local authority mortgages, are made aware of the opportunity.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

274. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the affordable housing scheme will be introduced; if work is being done on a cost rental model in order that mixed tenure housing can be realised in developments on publicly owned land and homes that are not provided under Part V in these developments can be genuinely affordable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45468/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing affordability has been examined by my Department, in consultation with the Housing Agency, local authorities and other stakeholders, as part of the targeted review of Rebuilding Ireland. The examination was carried out under the generally accepted premise that housing is deemed affordable where households, particularly low or moderate income households, are paying no more than a third of their disposable income on meeting their accommodation needs.

The work took account of the measures already taken to make housing more affordable. These include the streamlined planning system for large-scale housing developments; reduced development contributions; the €226 million LIHAF funding, the impact of Rent Pressure Zones and changes to apartment guidelines in 2015.

It also took account of the additional housing affordability measures contained in Budget 2018. As announced, there will be a second phase of the LIHAF infrastructure fund with an Exchequer contribution of €50 million to unlock additional lands for housing. I also secured funding to put in place a new serviced sites fund of €25 million specifically to deliver affordable housing on local authority sites. The new Home Building Finance Ireland fund is also of importance in terms of addressing the costs of delivering housing as it will provide finance at commercially competitive rates to developers.

Cognisant of the crucial role land plays in the delivery of affordable housing, my Department is taking a very active role in State land management. At this point over 2,000 hectares of public land has been mapped and all local authorities and the Housing Agency have been requested to prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for residential lands in their ownership. My Department facilitated a workshop for local authorities in July 2017 to commence this process. Once all the plans have been finalised and reviewed, they will be published.

Already, a number of major publicly owned sites have been brought forward for mixed-tenure development. For example, South Dublin County Council is advancing procurement to deliver approximately 900 social and affordable homes at Kilcarbery, Clondalkin on a 70:30 private and social housing proportional basis. In addition, Dublin City Council is advancing procurement to redevelop O’Devaney Gardens off Infirmary Road. That site can accommodate 600 homes and is being advanced on the basis of 30% social, 20% affordable purchase and 50% private. In relation to cost rental initiatives, the Housing Agency and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council are jointly progressing a pilot scheme for cost rental housing on a site at the Enniskerry Road, encompassing 50 cost rental and 100 social rental homes.

As part of the examination of housing affordability and the optimal use of publicly owned lands for housing, and recognising that delivering cost rental is a key part of the solution to the affordability challenge, work is underway to identify potential local authority sites for cost rental projects in areas of high housing demand and high accommodation costs.

The examination of housing affordability is now at an advanced stage and I expect to be in a position to outline the outcome, including any additional measures, in the coming weeks.

Departmental Reviews

275. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an examination of the effect of short-term lettings on the availability of housing for rent is being carried out under the auspices of his Department or under that of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45469/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department has established, and chairs a Working Group of all the major public stakeholders with a policy interest in Short-Term Letting, to develop guidance in relation to planning applications and changes of use relating to short term lettings and to examine the need for new regulatory arrangements. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is a member of the Working Group.

The proposals under consideration by the Working Group are aimed at facilitating short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences, known as home-sharing, while protecting existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand, safeguarding neighbourhood amenity and consumer protection and generating revenue to address any negative externalities of short-term letting.

The Working Group has met four times to date and the work is progressing well. The Group has recently completed the guidance for local authorities to assist them, when considering planning applications relating to short-term lettings. My Department has issued a circular in this regard to all Local Authorities earlier this week, a copy of which is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/circular_pl10_aph3_2017.pdf.

I have requested the Working Group to report to me before the end of the year on the appropriate regulatory approach for short-term tourism-related lettings, including consideration of the scope for a licensing regime, and the identification of any necessary amendments to existing legislation required.

Dublin City Council, in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland, are in the process of commissioning research to assess the extent, expectations and effect of short-term letting in Dublin. This study will inform the Working Group in developing its proposals.

The report prepared by the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on the Impact of Short-Term Lettings on Ireland’s Housing and Rental Market will also be considered by the Working Group in its deliberations.

Vacant Properties

276. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the empty homes strategy as committed to under Rebuilding Ireland will be published; if consideration is being given to improving current schemes to open up empty homes that are privately owned; his plans to provide for the use of CPOs more widely in cases in which homes are vacant for long periods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45470/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is presently engaging in consultations with a number of other Government Departments and agencies in relation to vacancy issues and I am keeping the range of schemes in place to address vacancy, particularly the Repair and Leasing and Buy and Renew schemes, under review in that context. Ahead of the conclusion of this work shortly, a range of vacancy related actions have been initiated, details of which are set out in my reply to Question No. 278 of 19 October 2017.

In relation to compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers, it should be noted that a large number of State bodies and authorities already have CPO powers, many of which are underpinned by different statutes. Considering the number of statutes involved, the complexity of the various pieces of legislation, and the 2015 judgment by Supreme Court in respect of a case in Co. Kildare, any review of CPO powers will be a significant task and will require detailed legal input to appropriately balance the constitutional property rights against the wider public interest.

In addition, the complexity of current statute law governing CPOs has been acknowledged by the Law Reform Commission which has begun a project on reform of the law of compulsory acquisition of land, as part of the Commission's current Fourth Programme of Law Reform. This project will explore the consolidation, clarification and reform of the rules and principles on compulsory acquisition of land, with the aim of putting in place a fair, effective and efficient system. Among the matters included in the project will be:

- simplification, consolidation and codification of the law;
- the principles for the assessment of compensation on the acquisition of land or interests in land;
- time limits for implementation of a CPO; and
- submissions from third parties whose land is not being acquired.

The Commission intends to publish a consultative Issues Paper, which will describe the current law and seek views from interested parties through targeted questions around how the law might be reformed, in the coming months. In this context, the outcomes of this LRC project will inform the assessment in my Department as to whether and what further review of CPO provisions is warranted.

Further to the above work being conducted by the LRC, and taking account of advice from the Attorney General, I also intend to engage directly with local authorities, who have practical, on-the-ground, operational knowledge and expertise on the CPO process within their own areas, and who may be able to identify practical measures or immediate legal reforms that could be taken in the short term to improve the existing processes.

Local Authority Housing Data

277. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority housing starts recorded on a monthly basis over the

course of the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45474/17]

278. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the local authority housing stock has increased by way of purchase of extra houses or new builds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45475/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 277 and 278 together.

Details in relation to social housing construction completions and acquisitions 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 is available therein for 2016 and to the end of quarter 2 of 2017. Information on quarter 3 of 2017 is currently being collected and will be published as soon as possible.

While my Department does not publish statistics on the number of social housing construction starts on a monthly basis, a comprehensive status report is published on a quarterly basis in relation to all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas. The most recent of these reports, which covers the period up to the end of quarter 2 of 2017, it contains information on the delivery of 11,000 new social homes – currently approved and progressing through planning, design, and construction, as well as 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-schemes-2017/>.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as projects are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing construction programmes as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

279. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties repossessed by financial institutions that have come into public ownership on a mortgage-to-rent basis, excluding those acquired by approved housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45476/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the existing Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme for borrowers of commercial private lending institutions that was introduced in 2012, an eligible household with an unsustainable mortgage voluntarily surrenders their property to their lender who in turn sells it to an Approved Housing Body (AHB). The AHB becomes the landlord and the household gets to remain in the family home as social housing tenants. The MTR scheme is solely concerned with eligible borrowers with unsustainable mortgages who voluntarily surrender their homes to an AHB. Repossessed properties do not fall within the remit of the scheme. In all MTR cases, the decision whether or not to take up the scheme rests with the borrower.

The MTR scheme is an established part of the overall suite of social housing options and an important part of the mortgage arrears resolution process.

Local Authority Housing Provision

280. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he expects extra local authority houses to become available in the course of the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45477/17]

284. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he will take to address the acute problem of the local authority housing shortage in the short-term with particular reference to the need to identify more ambitious targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45481/17]

287. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he entered into dialogue with the local authorities with a view to ensuring the immediate implementation of a local authority housing programme sufficient to address the problem of homelessness and to reduce the existing local authority housing waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45484/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280, 284 and 287 together.

To support and accelerate the delivery of social housing, as set out in Rebuilding Ireland, the necessary funding is in place, with a greater emphasis now being placed on direct build activity for local authorities and approved housing bodies. In 2017, funding of almost €1.3 billion is being made available to support housing programmes, including the delivery of over 21,000 social housing supports.

In Budget 2018, I secured €1.9 billion for housing programmes next year. This is a 46% increase over 2017 and will support the housing needs of 25,500 households. A large element, €1.14 billion, is for the delivery of almost 5,900 social homes through a range of construction (5,000) and acquisition (900) programmes. The balance of the funding will add new tenancies and maintain existing ones through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and long-term leasing. It will also fund other important housing supports and services in relation to homelessness, regeneration and programmes to upgrade existing housing (energy efficiency improvements, adaptation grants, housing for Travellers, pyrite, etc).

Additionally, I secured a further €500 million for investment in social housing over the period 2019–2021, which will increase the overall level of social housing to be delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies by a further 3,000 homes. The overall target for social housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland, therefore, has increased from 47,000 to 50,000 homes, with the total funding investment increasing from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion.

The following table sets out the targets in respect of social housing under the main programme areas for each year of Rebuilding Ireland. It also includes targets for the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) under which, in addition to the 50,000 homes referred to above, a further 88,000 housing solutions will be provided -

Year		Build	Acquisition	Leasing	RAS	HAP
2016	Target	2,260	1,755	225	1,000	12,000
2017	Target	3,200	1,250	600	1,000	15,000
2018	Target	4,969	900	2,000	600	17,000
2019	Target	6,385	1,025	2,130	600	16,760

Year		Build	Acquisition	Leasing	RAS	HAP
2020	Target	7,716	800	2,631	600	13,000
2021	Target	8,907	800	2,450	-	10,000

The level of social housing construction activity can be seen in the status reports now published on a quarterly basis in relation to all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas. These reports show details such as project locations and scale, as well as information relating to their advancement. The most recent report covers the period up to the end of quarter 2 of 2017 and contains information on the delivery of 11,000 new social homes, currently approved and progressing through planning, design and 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/>.

I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing programmes as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Local Authority Housing Provision

281. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has offered the option of modular housing to the local authorities that have long housing waiting lists; if so, the uptake in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45478/17]

282. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which rapid build or modular housing has been offered to Kildare County Council having regard to the seriousness of the housing situation in view of the fact that this will not improve unless steps are taken to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45479/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 281 and 282 together.

Utilising innovative construction technologies can accelerate housing provision, as timeframes are considerably less than for traditional build. Faster delivery may also mean that homes can be provided at more affordable rates than traditional build. To date, my Department's focus in relation to this form of house building has been on encouraging its use for accelerated delivery of social housing units and considerable progress is being made.

In that regard, my Department recently asked all local authorities, including Kildare County Council, to review the social housing projects in their areas and in the interest of achieving earliest delivery, they have been requested to consider their suitability for Design and Build contracts under the Rapid Build Framework, which includes modular design, set up by the Office Of Government Procurement. They were asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are amenable to early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

In response, some authorities have indicated that a number of approved schemes and new schemes under consideration may be suitable. I expect that some authorities will utilise the OGP Rapid Build framework to help expedite delivery and I expect to be announcing further details in this regard in the coming weeks.

The question of utilising rapid build methodologies and other innovative construction technologies is, ultimately, a matter for consideration by each local authority in the context of individual projects. As I previously indicated to the Deputy, my Department and I are working with local authorities and approved housing bodies to accelerate the delivery of all housing, including rapid build, in order to tackle the current housing waiting lists and to deliver homes, as quickly as possible, to those who need them.

Local Authority Housing Provision

283. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which planning procedures can be expedited to facilitate the building of extra local authority houses with particular reference to the need to make an impact on the numbers on local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45480/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In relation to the planning process, the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 amended section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, relating to the arrangements for approval by local authorities of their own development proposals, often referred to as the Part 8 process, to provide for greater clarity around timelines associated with the various steps in the process. This amendment required a supporting amendment to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, which was provided for in the Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017.

Under the new arrangements, which came into operation from 3 July 2017, the maximum timeframe for the determination of local authority own development proposals is 20 weeks from the date of issue of the proposals for public consultation by the Chief Executive, whereas previously there was no maximum timeframe.

These reforms provide greater certainty around the timeframes for such proposals, including proposals for social housing projects and infrastructure servicing both public and private development.

Question No. 284 answered with Question No. 280.

Local Authority Housing Provision

285. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he might authorise the reintroduction of the rural housing programme, with particular reference to those on the local authority housing lists coming from a rural area being facilitated by way of a programme to ensure that they might be housed in their own area rather than adding to the waiting lists in urban areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45482/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The purpose of the assessment is to count the total number of households qualified for and in need of social housing support across the country on a specified date in order to inform policy and plan for the right types of housing support.

The most recent statutory summary of social housing assessments, carried out in 2016,

details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 21 September 2016.

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

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf.

In line with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 summaries are now being carried out on an annual basis. I expect the results of the 2017 Summary to be available for publication in the coming weeks.

It is a matter for each local authority to determine the nature, location and relative priority of individual social housing projects and the SSHA data can be utilised to aid this process. In submitting proposals for funding to my Department in respect of new social housing projects, local authorities may include proposals for single social houses in rural areas where they have identified and prioritised such need.

Addressing our housing shortage and homelessness crisis is the Government's number one priority. The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, is focussed on increasing and accelerating housing delivery, across all tenures. The funding earmarked for the Action Plan was increased from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion in Budget 2018.

Local authorities now have substantial pipelines of new social housing projects, details of which have been published and are available at the following link: *<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/>*.

I am keen that local authorities advance their projects as soon as possible and have assured them that funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard.

Local Authority Housing Provision

286. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which serviced or serviceable lands, zoned or unzoned, have been identified by each of the local authorities in the greater Dublin area to facilitate a rapid build housing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45483/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 27 April 2017, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to accommodate some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes.

Details in relation to these sites can be viewed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

All local authorities have been requested to prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for residential lands in their ownership to ensure they are brought forward for development at the earliest appropriate opportunity. My Department facilitated a workshop for local authorities in July to commence this process. Once all the plans have been reviewed and finalised, they will be made available publicly, both on the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland web-

site as well as on the website of the relevant local authority.

Utilising Rapid Build and other innovative construction technologies can accelerate housing provision, as timeframes are considerably less than for traditional build. This form of house building is being encouraged for accelerated delivery of social units under my Department's programmes. Faster delivery may also mean the units can be provided at lower cost than traditional build, given that the latter may have significantly greater labour costs over the course of construction. The question of utilising Rapid Build methodologies for housing on local authority sites is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant local authority in the context of each individual project.

The rapid delivery programme has seen new social homes completed in Dublin at Poppintree, Ballymun (22 homes) and Finglas (39 homes). Other rapid delivery projects are nearing completion, including at Mulhuddart (20), Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot (24), Mourne Road, Drimnagh (29) and Belcamp (38), a range of other projects are progressing, and a number of further additional projects are in planning, including projects outside Dublin.

I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing construction programme as speedily as possible, using the optimum delivery mechanism and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Question No. 287 answered with Question No. 280.

Local Authority Housing Provision

288. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the number of families deemed homeless in County Kildare are likely to achieve accommodation in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45485/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Kildare County Council, along with all other local authorities, is being funded to increase significantly its delivery of social housing as part of Rebuilding Ireland. In Budget 2018, I secured €1.9 billion for housing programmes next year, a 46% increase over 2017. It will support the housing needs of 25,500 households. I also secured an additional €500 million in investment in 3,000 extra social homes over the period 2019–2021, which means the Rebuilding Ireland social housing target is increasing from 47,000 to 50,000 homes, with the total funding investment growing from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion.

An important aspect of this delivery is new social housing construction and details of all the projects under that programme are now published quarterly. The latest report, setting out the position at end Q2 2017, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>

This report shows a sizeable construction portfolio for County Kildare, delivering over 280 new social homes. In fact, since the publication of that report, a further five new social housing construction projects, with 72 new homes, have been approved for the County.

In addition to the permanent accommodation solutions that we are putting in place, I also recently opened a new family hub development at Athy, where the Council and the Peter McVerry Trust have delivered good quality, supported accommodation for 7 families who were experiencing homelessness.

In tandem with the construction programme, all local authorities have been undertaking the targeted acquisition of properties for immediate social housing use and so far this year, Kildare County Council has purchased over 80 such homes. Approved housing bodies (AHBs) are also very active in delivery in Kildare, as can be seen with the 45 new homes approved through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility and, over 2016/17, a further 100 new homes were acquired by AHBs for households on the Kildare social housing waiting list through the Capital Assistance Scheme.

In addition, between 2014 and the end of this year, around 100 vacant social houses in Kildare will have been returned to productive use through the programme of funding support from my Department.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme is also supporting local authorities and AHBs for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from private owners and developers for social housing use. Currently, there are around 375 operational units under this programme in Kildare.

Over 1,300 households are also being supported currently through the HAP scheme in Kildare. This will continue to provide a flexible housing support for addressing the housing needs of households presenting as homeless to Kildare County Council.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which emergency housing accommodation is available to Kildare County Council to accommodate the increasing emergency housing need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45486/17]

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which he expects to meet the imminent housing demand following the displacement of persons from private accommodation for a variety of reasons, including repossession and the immediate needs of such persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45489/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 and 292 together.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities. My Department has no function in relation to operational issues, such as placements into emergency accommodation, which are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Under the Housing Act 1988, it is a matter for the housing authority concerned to determine whether a person is regarded as homeless. Any person regarded as homeless by a housing authority may be placed into temporary emergency accommodation, which the housing authority may arrange itself or which may be operated by a State-funded service provider. I am satisfied that housing authorities, including Kildare County Council, are making every effort to provide the most suitable accommodation available to homeless households seeking emergency accommodation

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness comprises a range of ac-

tions to tackle homelessness and to assist families residing in emergency accommodation. It is evident that the long-term solution to the current homelessness crisis is to increase the supply of new homes, across all forms of housing, to 25,000 per annum by 2020. Over one year into the plan, all of the key statistical indicators point to a significant scaling up of housing activity, with planning permissions, commencement notices and ESB residential connections all increasing substantially. With over 19,000 households having had their social housing needs met in 2016, I expect that a further 21,000 such supports will be delivered in 2017.

With regard to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), there are currently more than 28,500 households being supported by the scheme and over 14,500 of these households commenced HAP support since the beginning of 2017; more than 350 households are being set up on HAP each week in 2017.

It is intended that the long-term housing needs of households in emergency accommodation will be met through a range of social housing supports such as the HAP scheme and through general social housing allocations. Significant progress is being made, with over 3,000 sustainable exits from homelessness into independent tenancies being achieved in 2016, and 2,000 further such exits being achieved during the first half of 2017.

It should be noted that Budget 2018 provides for a national allocation of €116 million for homeless services - an additional €18 million, or 18%, on this year's provision of €98m, and a 66% increase on the 2016 provision of €70m.

Urban Development

290. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress over the past six months in respect of the town centre, Naas, County Kildare, with particular reference to the urgent need to restart the project and encourage a major anchor tenant into the centre, thereby facilitating the reinvigoration of the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45487/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The management of issues related to this development are primarily a matter for Kildare County Council and one in which I have no function.

Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be involved, except in very specific circumstances.

As outlined in previous replies to the Deputy's Question Numbers 1265 and 1266 of 13th July 2017, I understand from Kildare County Council that a Receiver has been appointed in relation to the site in question and the Council continues to encourage the Receiver to develop the site or put the property up for sale as soon as possible.

However, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the specific case.

Local Authority Housing Data

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families rehoused by Kildare County Council in each of the past two years to date in 2017, excluding the use of voids; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45488/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations, the allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for Kildare County Council. Therefore, my Department does not hold the information requested.

Question No. 292 answered with Question No. 289.

Water Services Provision

293. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will undertake a review of responsibility for the maintenance of the public sewerage system in view of the fact that the establishment of Irish Water residences and businesses now have the responsibility of the infrastructure to the centre of the road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45534/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Irish Water is responsible for water services infrastructure including water supply pipes or sewers extending from a waterworks or waste water works to the curtilage of a property.

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

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

Fire Stations Provision

294. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the proposal to provide a new fire station in Ballybay, County Monaghan, will be progressed during 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45608/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

Monaghan County Council has prioritised a new fire station project in Castleblayney and

this is included as part of this programme under the list of priority projects to be progressed for 2019. Ballybay is also included under the 2016 – 2020 Capital Programme as a new build station project to be included in annual reviews. Approval-in-principle issued in 2008 for a new fire station at Corrybrennan, Ballybay to a maximum cost of €1,000,000. In April 2009, design and cost plans were received in my Department indicating a total cost of € 1.2 million. The Council was recouped €17,000 for professional fees in 2012 and €100,000 site acquisition costs in 2016.

Correspondence was received by my Department in July this year requesting inclusion of Ballybay in the Capital Programme, stating that the current station falls short of the needs of Monaghan Fire Service. A revised cost plan has been requested from Monaghan County Council and upon receipt of this, my Department will continue working with the local authority to progress this project.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

295. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the recent figures for the strength in whole-time equivalent terms of the Permanent Defence Force with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45493/17]

296. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the recent figures for the strength of the Reserve Defence Forces with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45494/17]

297. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of additional recruits the Permanent Defence Force have taken on to date in 2017 with regard to all three services; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45495/17]

298. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of whole-time equivalent persons who have been recruited in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, to the Permanent Defence Forces. [45496/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 295 to 298, inclusive, together.

The following tables set out below provide the strength of the Permanent Defence Force as of 30 September 2017 across all three services and ranks, broken down by gender. The figures provided are for whole time equivalent posts.

Army

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant General	1	0	1
Major General	2	0	2
Brigadier General	6	0	6
Colonel	32	1	33
Lieutenant Colonel	101	2	103
Commandant	217	33	250
Captain	220	46	266
Lieutenant	103	13	116

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Sergeant Major	26	0	26
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	26	0	26
Company Sergeant	82	2	84
Company Quartermaster Sergeant	139	2	141
Sergeant	752	52	804
Corporal	1,228	107	1,335
Private	3,738	200	3,938
Cadets	124	27	151
Total	6,797	485	7,282

Air Corps

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Brigadier General	1	0	1
Colonel	2	0	2
Lieutenant Colonel	11	0	11
Commandant	31	2	33
Captain	44	7	51
Lieutenant	22	0	22
Sergeant Major	6	1	7
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	3	0	3
Company Sergeant	52	0	52
Company Quartermaster Sergeant	9	1	10
Sergeant	95	7	102
Corporal	141	10	151
Private	210	7	217
Cadets	42	1	43
Total	669	36	705

Naval Service

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Brigadier General	1	0	1
Colonel	2	0	2
Lieutenant Colonel	13	0	13
Commandant	42	8	50
Captain	38	14	52
Lieutenant	42	2	44
Sergeant Major	5	0	5
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	6	0	6
Company Sergeant	66	0	66
Company Quartermaster Sergeant	13	0	13
Sergeant	158	7	165
Corporal	126	8	134
Private	475	25	500
Cadets	22	2	24
Total	1,009	66	1,075

The tables below set out the effective strength of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve as of 30 September 2017, by rank, service and gender.

Army Reserve

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant Colonel	5	0	5
Commandant	48	2	50
Captain	35	1	36
Lieutenant	142	40	182
Sergeant Major	1	0	1
Battalion Quarter Master Sergeant	5	0	5
Company Sergeant	43	0	43
Company Quarter Master Sergeant	55	2	57
Sergeant	232	19	251
Corporal	279	67	346
Private	685	128	813
Total	1,530	259	1,789

Naval Service Reserve

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Lieutenant Colonel	0	0	0
Commandant	4	0	4
Captain	5	0	5
Lieutenant	6	1	7
Sergeant Major	0	0	0
Battalion Quarter Master Sergeant	1	0	1
Company Sergeant	6	0	6
Company Quarter Master Sergeant	0	0	0
Sergeant	10	0	10
Corporal	17	5	22
Private	58	14	72
Total	107	20	127

The table below sets out the number of additional general service recruits the Permanent Defence Force have taken on to-date in 2017.

Service	Total	Male	Female
Army	448	412	36
Naval Service	62	52	10
Air Corps	22	22	0
Total	532	486	46

The table below sets out the number of whole time equivalent persons recruited in the years 2017 to-date (including general service recruits, cadets, direct entry).

26 October 2017

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 to date
446	503	415	690	645

There is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level and it is anticipated that up to 800 new personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force during 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers. A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment to the Defence Forces and ensuring that, where possible, the terms and conditions of service are as favourable as they can be within the current budgetary parameters.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, the Government is committed to retaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and abroad.