

Written Answers.

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

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

Questions Nos. 11 to 27, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 28 to 39, inclusive, answered orally.

Irish Aviation Authority

40. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions he will take in view of the deficiencies within the Irish Aviation Authority highlighted by the Helios section 32 report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49282/17]

51. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that no section 32 reports on the performance by the IAA of its functions relating to the application and enforcement of technical and safety standards for aircraft and air navigation were commissioned by his Department in the years 2007, 2010 and 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49337/17]

75. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will meet with representatives of an association (details supplied) to discuss the outcome of the examination under section 32 of the Irish Aviation Act 1993 of the Irish Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49281/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 40, 51 and 75 together.

As I have advised the House previously, civil aviation is a highly regulated global industry, and there are extensive EU and international rules and regulations which all member states are obliged to comply with.

In Ireland, the Irish Aviation Authority is the designated, statutory body for aviation regulation and it is subject to an extensive performance audit regime. This includes international oversight under ICAO's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme and under the European Aviation Safety Agency's standardisation audits.

In addition, Section 32 of the Irish Aviation Authority Act 1993 provides for an examination and report to the Minister for Transport on the performance of the IAA with regard to its safety regulation functions and air navigation service. The findings of the most recent Section

32 examination by the expert consultancy firm Helios, as set out in its Final Report of 2015, are in line with the positive views of both ICAO and EASA. To reiterate, the IAA is subject to three separate, detailed performance audit review processes - one under domestic law by the Minister, one under European law by EASA, and one under international agreement by the UN's ICAO.

Regarding the Helios Report raised by the Deputy, the Report notes that: the IAA's "level of compliance with European and ICAO safety regulations and standards and recommended practices is very high, evidenced by EASA standardisation audits and other audits over a sustained period where the IAA has consistently performed well. The IAA is well resourced with a level of industry experience and technical expertise that is amongst the best in Europe".

As with any good and robust audit process, the Helios Section 32 Report made recommendations for further improvement. The whole purpose of the audit regimes described above is to verify current performance against current requirements and also to push organisations to engage in continuous improvement. The IAA has established an implementation plan to address these areas for further improvement and is reporting periodically to my Department on progress.

In the period up to 2007, three examinations were carried out under Section 32. In 2009, the then Minister for Transport, Mr Noel Dempsey set out in a Dáil reply of 3 November 2009 the reasons for his decision not to carry out an examination under the Section 32 provision at that juncture. This was due to a number of factors, including plans at the time to restructure the IAA.

Within my remit, I will consider any request from the association referred to by the Deputy to meet and discuss matters of concern to it, including relating to the outcome of the Section 32 examination.

Civil Aviation Regulation

41. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the progress made regarding his promised review of the issuing of permits for carrying weapons and munitions on civilian aircraft. [49341/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The internal review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973 is currently underway. The purpose of the internal review is to identify the options available for various aspects of the Order.

The internal review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973 is currently underway. The purpose of the internal review is to identify the options available for various aspects of the Order.

The Chicago Convention, which is the main international treaty governing the operation of civil aviation, states that no civil aircraft may carry munitions of war over a state without that state's permission. This requirement is ratified in Irish law by the 1973 Order. Under the terms of the Order the carriage of weapons and munitions of war is prohibited in any civil aircraft in Irish airspace and on board any Irish registered aircraft, unless an exemption is granted by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

In accordance with the provisions of the 1973 Order, my Department operates a procedure under which airlines wishing to carry weapons or munitions through Irish airspace or airports

must apply for each flight at least 48 hours in advance. My Department seeks the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to foreign policy issues and the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to security issues. The IAA is consulted in relation to aviation safety issues for applications involving munitions that are also categorised as dangerous goods. If any of these bodies objects, an exemption will generally not be granted.

Officials in my Department are currently liaising with the other departments and agencies concerned and the internal review of the Order should be completed the coming months.

I should point out that the internal review is examining the Statutory Instrument primarily from an administrative and legal perspective. There is no proposal to change the long-standing Government policy of permitting aircraft used by the defence forces of various nations to transit through Irish airspace and airports, subject to appropriate terms and conditions.

Rugby World Cup 2023

42. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on his role and work and that of his Department in Ireland's bid for the Rugby World Cup. [49111/17]

52. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reasons for the failure of the bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023; the aspects of the bid that could be improved in future bids to host international sporting competitions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49286/17]

91. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his role in Ireland's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023; and his reasoning as to the unsuccessful nature of this bid. [49432/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42, 52 and 91 together.

Before I respond to the deputies' questions, I wish to reiterate my congratulations to France on their win. As I have said, I wish them every success as they turn their attention to delivering what I hope will be an outstanding tournament in 2023.

Wednesday's result was disappointing, particularly after the years of work put into the bid. However, in our disappointment, we should not lose sight of the fact that the technical report found that Ireland would be an excellent host country for a Rugby World Cup.

Ireland was up against two previous hosts and in the evaluation report we fell behind them based on the quality of their stadia, many of which are recently built as result of hosting Euro 2016 and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. We presented a different, more sustainable, vision that involved investment in existing stadia to meet tournament standards. Unfortunately, RWCL's (Rugby World Cup Ltd) evaluators did not agree. In any event, ultimately the voters did not support the RWCL recommendation.

We did not win the bid due to not having secured a sufficient number of the votes cast last Wednesday. Unfortunately, that is the nature of the competitive process used. In a competition of this nature there always will be a winner and losers. We will of course learn from this experience and use that learning in any future bids for sporting events, but that does not take away from the excellent work that was done in preparing our bid.

My Department took the lead role in co-ordinating the input of Government Departments and public sector in support of the Bid as well putting in place the legislation and guarantees required by World Rugby. I am satisfied that the Government gave the IRFU all the support that was asked of it in its efforts to secure the Rugby World Cup in 2023.

I would like to particularly thank the IRFU, our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive, the members of the RWC 2023 Oversight Board, those who took on ambassadorial roles for the bid, the civil and public services and many State bodies, and the people of Ireland, all of whom have given such incredible support to this bid.

Rail Services Provision

43. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which it is expected to augment the commuter rail service serving north County Kildare with particular reference to the need to ensure adequate carriages to accommodate and meet commuter requirements in order to eliminate passengers having to stand for the duration of the journey; the steps he plans to take in the short term to address this issue and in the long term to upgrade, including the extension of the DART to the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49434/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day to day operations of public transport. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the NTA is the statutory body with responsibility for the issues raised in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann.

The PSO subvention for public transport services increased last year, again this year and will increase yet further next year. Over the three years PSO subvention will have increased by some 35% in total. This means that in 2018 over €285 million will be allocated via the National Transport Authority (NTA) to support the continued delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable services that have grown in recent years.

The upgrade to the Phoenix Park Tunnel in 2016 has seen commuters on the Kildare to Dublin Heuston line have the option of direct trains to Connolly, Tara Street, Pearse and Grand Canal Dock Stations. The NTA is also continually monitoring and reviewing the operation of contracted bus and rail services in conjunction with the operators to ensure that the needs of the travelling public are met to the greatest possible extent. The NTA has previously extended the Short Hop Zone for rail travel on the Kildare line to Sallins/Naas and Kilcock stations, which considerably reduced the cost of travel for passengers commuting from those stations.

The DART Expansion Programme is a cornerstone project of the NTA Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035. Under this Programme, the DART system will be expanded, providing fast, high-frequency electrified services to Maynooth and M3 Parkway on the Maynooth/Sligo Line, Hazelhatch on the Kildare Line and Drogheda on the Northern Line, while continuing to provide DART services on the South-Eastern Line as far south as Greystones. The NTA in collaboration with Iarnród Éireann is continuing to work on the DART Expansion Programme – Pre-planning Stage.

EU Regulations

44. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report to Dáil Éireann on progress regarding primary legislation and nominating a competent authority to implement EU Regulation 598/14. [49340/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Deputy, you will recall that in October, I advised the Dáil of the most recent legal advices made available to me at that time which had the effect of ruling out the Irish Aviation Authority as the preferred body to be nominated Competent Authority for the purposes of EU Regulation 598/14.

This represented a very late-in-the-day development, and it has resulted in my Department having to go back to the drawing board to some extent.

As promised last month, I can advise the Deputy that there has been a series of high level meetings involving my Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. All parties are agreed on the need to find a resolution to this matter soon, and I expect to receive revised proposals in the near future. I expect those proposals to be legally robust, and therefore they will be subject to detailed legal scrutiny before a final decision is made. I can assure the Deputy that there is strong political support amongst my Cabinet colleagues to have this matter settled as soon as possible.

I can also assure the Deputy of a number of other things:

- As soon as an implementable course of action is presented to me for decision I will advise this House of my intentions;

- The interests of residents who live in the vicinity of Dublin Airport will be properly reflected and protected in whatever approach is developed. Access to public consultation and a transparent and balanced decision making process is paramount.

- There will be primary legislation, and therefore the Oireachtas will have full opportunity to examine and help shape the State's approach to implementing EU Regulation 598/14.

Railway Stations

45. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeframe for the train station at Royal Canal Park; if his attention has been drawn to the lack of transport infrastructure facing persons who live in the area; his plans to upgrade the Royal Canal path between Ashtown and Boombridge station with improved lighting. [49349/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy may be aware plans have been developed for a new train station at Pelletstown, approximately mid-way between Broombridge and Ashtown railway stations. As well as serving this area with a new train station, this facility also incorporates a pedestrian/cycle bridge over both the railway and the canal at this location. This will link with the canal towpath on the north side of the canal, allowing pedestrians to use the canal tow path to walk to Broombridge railway station/Luas stop, where there will be another pedestrian bridge spanning the canal and railway.

In relation to Pelletstown Station, planning permission is in place and work is currently ongoing to complete a detailed design and prepare tender documents for the station's construction. This work is expected to be completed in the next two months and the NTA expect to be able to advise a firm timeline for the construction of this station very early next year.

Investment is also planned for the bus network to greatly improve transport infrastructure across the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Work is ongoing on the new BusConnects programme, announced by the NTA earlier this year. Bus Connects will provide a greatly enhanced bus service across Dublin, with high quality infrastructure and services, coupled with major improvements in ticketing and information, all providing a modern, faster, reliable, convenient and attractive public transport solution.

Road Network

46. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the M3 motorway was not constructed as far as Cavan town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49144/17]

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

My understanding is that the background to the M3 Scheme lies in the National Road Authority National Road Needs Study 1998. This study reviewed future road investment needs and concluded that a dual carriageway type road was required to cater for anticipated traffic flows between Clonee and Kells. That Study also concluded that a dual carriageway standard road was not indicated for the section of the route north of Kells.

Public Transport Subsidies

47. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the changes to policy he plans to implement, in view of the fact that during recent industrial disputes at Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann those companies indicated that they are in significant financial distress due to a lack of Government funding; the actions he will take to ensure that the companies are funded sufficiently, particularly in terms of capital investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49284/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Financial support from the Exchequer - or taxpayer - for public transport takes two main forms: there is current funding for the Public Service Obligation (PSO) subvention to help fund the operational costs of delivering services, and there is capital funding for investment in infrastructure and facilities. Both of these funding streams have been growing and, as announced recently in Budget 2018, they are now budgeted to continue to grow further.

The PSO subvention for public transport services increased last year, again this year and will increase yet further next year. Over the three years PSO subvention will have increased by some 35% in total. This means that in 2018 over €285 million will be allocated via the National Transport Authority (NTA) to support the continued delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable services that have grown in recent years.

Multi-annual capital funding for investment in public transport is provided under the Government's Capital Plan. An enhanced four-year capital envelope for public transport of over €2.7 billion was announced in Budget 2018, which is a 30% increase over the original Capital Plan allocations for the period 2018-21. This funding will enable both necessary investment in

maintaining the existing public transport infrastructure (especially the rail network) in order to underpin the continued provision of safe and effective transport services, and it will also allow for considerable investment in new infrastructure and facilities so as to expand capacity, address congestion and enhance services.

The capital allocation provides capital funding to semi State providers of public transport both directly and through the NTA. In accordance with the requirements of EU law, my Department provides capital funding to Iarnród Éireann for the maintenance and renewal of the heavy rail network under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC). The present IMMAC covers the five-year period 2014-2018. Iarnród Éireann also receives capital funding, via the NTA, for heavy rail projects in the Greater Dublin Area as well as funding under the Accessibility Grants and Regional Cities Programmes.

My Department also provides capital funding to the NTA for a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment of the Bus Átha Cliath and Bus Éireann PSO fleets. Funding is also provided to these two companies for accessibility projects and funding for Bus Éireann under the Regional Cities Programme.

Road Network

48. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame for a safety review of a road (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49145/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the allocation of funding to individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

I understand from TII that a safety review of the N2 in County Monaghan, between Drumgeeny and the Castleblayney Bypass, has been completed and various measures that were identified in the review to improve safety on this section of the route have been carried out.

In light of the findings of the review, discussions have taken place between officials of TII and the road authorities concerned, Monaghan and Louth County Councils, and it has been agreed that the improvement of a 36km section of the N2 between Ardee and Castleblayney will be progressed as a major road project. Monaghan County Council and Louth County Council, with the support of TII, will, therefore, commence the establishment of a project team and the procurement of Technical Advisors to bring the scheme from inception to the preparation of CPO/EIS documentation and Business Case.

Additionally, TII has conveyed approval to Monaghan County Council to re-activate the proposed N2 Clontibret to the Border road improvement scheme.

The progression of the schemes concerned to construction stage will be subject to the satisfactory conclusion of the planning and approval processes and the availability of funding.

Civil Aviation Regulation

49. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 180 of 18 October 2017, if he is satisfied with the regulatory oversight and enforcement duties carried out by the IAA in regard to its oversight of proactive crew fatigue mitigation through adequate manpower planning in the context of safety management systems, in view of the recent revelations in regard to insufficient pilots at an airline (details supplied) to crew a schedule which was published approximately six months beforehand. [49339/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Aviation Authority is responsible for the safety oversight of the Irish civil aviation industry, and it ensures that all air carriers comply fully with all safety regulations to the highest international safety standards, including Flight Time Limitation (FTL) rules. No Irish air carrier can operate its services without maintaining full compliance with all safety regulations.

Civil aviation is a highly regulated global industry, with very good reason, and the IAA is consistently found to be amongst the best performing national aviation safety regulatory bodies in the world. Performance audits by the UN's International Civil Aviation Organisation and by the European Aviation Safety Agency have shown this.

Manpower planning is a matter for individual companies, and each airline is entirely responsible for managing its operations to comply with European regulations, provided it is deemed acceptable by the safety regulator. The airline which the Deputy refers to has accepted full responsibility for what has occurred. It is precisely because the airline is required to comply with EU requirements concerning flight time limitations, for the purpose of ensuring aviation safety, that it was forced to take the regrettable but necessary steps to cancel and reschedule flights.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

50. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the announcement in budget 2018 of additional capital funding as part of the mid-term capital review for his Department for €46 million in 2018, €315 million in 2019 and €413 million in 2020, the additional capital works to be undertaken with this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44698/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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). In the meantime my Department is in discussion with relevant agencies regarding the details of allocations. The Government has also proposed that a ten year national investment plan will be set out which will take account of the National Planning Framework. My Department will also take that into account when setting infrastructure investment priorities over the coming years.

On Thursday 12th of October, I outlined my view of what our current priorities for investment are to the Dáil and I have also published further details in a separate speech which is available at www.dttas.ie/speeches/2017/minister-ross-budget-2018-speech.

I would ask the Deputy to note that the information detailed in those speeches is for a four year period of capital investment, between the year 2018 and the year 2021, rather than out to 2020 as requested by the Deputy. We have planned our investment on the basis of resources available to us out to 2021. I think it is more helpful and that the Deputy will get a greater appreciation for our ambition for these projects and programmes if the detail is viewed in that context.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 40.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 42.

Tourism Promotion

53. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the international marketing campaign for 2018 to be delivered by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland with an emphasis on the positions of Dublin and the breath of fresh air campaign within those strategies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49424/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Tourism Ireland is the agency responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a tourism destination. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Tourism Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland for direct reply, albeit I understand that they have not yet published marketing plans for 2018. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Rail Network

54. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will assure Irish Rail passengers that no rail line in the network will be closed; and the timeframe for the review report to be published. [49280/17]

57. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when it is planned to make final decisions on the rail review carried out by Iarnród Éireann and TII in 2016; if consideration is being given to the closure of some railway lines based on this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49436/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 57 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann report on the Rail Review was published in 2016. Since then, the NTA has held a public consultation on the Review. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process.

The NTA recently submitted a report of those submissions to my Department. When I have reviewed the report and the NTA has updated it to reflect the increased funding that has now been made available in Budget 2018 for both current subvention and, in particular, the Capital Plan 2018 to 2021, I intend to bring it to Government for consideration.

It is my intention that the NTA's report on the consultation would be published by the NTA following consideration by Government. In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines or investment in the company and its relevant infrastructure.

Clearly the role and potential of rail is intrinsically linked to where people live, work and wish to travel and these very issues form the core of Government's National Planning Framework which has recently been published for public consultation. When finalised, the new National Planning Framework will form an important context for consideration of issues raised by the Rail Review Report and for any recommendations that I may bring to Government in due course.

Public Transport Initiatives

55. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the transport forum will be established; the functions this body will discharge; the way in which persons who utilise all transport modes will be involved in this forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49137/17]

64. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the timeframe on the delivery and implementation of the promised stakeholder forum for transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49344/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 64 together.

The Deputies will be aware that Iarnród Éireann workers are currently balloting on the recent Labour Court Recommendation and I do not wish to interfere in any way in that process. However, I would like to assure the Deputies that I look forward and remain committed to holding a dialogue with public transport stakeholders at an appropriate time and I hope that this can be shortly.

I believe that this type of broad dialogue will allow for a meaningful exchange of views about how we should shape the development of our public transport policy over the next 10 to 15 years. This dialogue will, I hope, allow for the sharing of ideas from a diverse range of perspectives as we look to inform the development of a statement on public transport policy.

Bus Éireann Services

56. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the reason for service cancellations in Bus Éireann is the inoperable rosters forced on persons in the aftermath of the strike; and his views on the continued service reductions and the impact of same on passengers. [49279/17]

62. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the numerous service cancellations recently affecting Bus Éireann services are the responsibility of the NTA or of Bus Éireann management; his views on whether the recently concluded productivity deal supported by him and the NTA has played a part in those service disruptions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49278/17]

84. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the implementation of the Labour Court's recommendations regarding the restructuring of Bus Éireann in view of the ongoing unrest and possibility of disruptions to services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49429/17]

90. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the implementation of the new rosters in Bus Éireann and his engagement with the trade unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49425/17]

94. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will liaise with Bus Éireann management regarding the ongoing disruption to bus services on the M3 corridor routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49220/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56, 62, 84, 90 and 94 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

As the Deputies will be aware, in April last, following a 3 week strike, the Labour Court made a Recommendation in relation to Bus Éireann. This was accepted by both the Company and the trade unions and implementation of the Recommendation is underway in the company.

While a number of services were impacted in the early stages of the changes in rosters, Bus Éireann have advised that is continuing to implement measures to further improve service levels, and that recently there have only been a very small number of cancellations.

Regular updates have been issued from the company with regards to the delays and cancellations and additional measures have been introduced by the company to regularise operations and minimise impacts.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) which has responsibility for ensuring delivery of bus services is aware that Bus Éireann has been experiencing operational issues in the eastern region recently and it is a matter for the Company to resolve those issues. The NTA is closely monitoring developments and has reminded Bus Éireann of its performance obligations under its contract with the NTA including the importance of providing relevant and timely information to customers. The NTA has indicated that it will give consideration in due course to the appropriate course of action under that contract.

The implementation of the Labour Court Recommendation continues to be a matter for the Company and the trade unions, and operational difficulties can be resolved through constructive and realistic engagement on both sides.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 54.

Tourism Promotion

58. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the considerable loss of funding that has been suffered by a company (details supplied) in recent months and the fact that much of the midlands now lacks a body to promote it as a tourist destination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49431/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I understand that the organisation mentioned by the Deputy previously received funding under the Community Services Programme, which is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

My Department has no role regarding that programme. There is no mechanism by which similar funding could be provided by either my Department or the tourism agencies.

On the matter of the promotion of the midlands region as a tourist destination, this is an operational matter for the boards and management of the two tourism agencies - Tourism Ireland in regard to overseas tourism marketing and Fáilte Ireland in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland for consideration. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Regional Road Network

59. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure a substantial increase in the financial allocation to Cavan County Council for the road works programme for 2018 in view of the deterioration of parts of the non-national road network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49354/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Regional and Local Road allocations under the three main grant categories (Restoration Maintenance, Restoration Improvement and Discretionary Grant) are allocated based on the length of mileage of regional and local roads within the county.

It is expected that regional and local road allocations for 2018 will be notified to local authorities in January 2018. In line with my Department's 2018 roads budget, an increase in allocations to local authorities is anticipated.

Civil Aviation Regulation

60. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 180 of 18 October 2017 and the response of the IAA to same, his views on the findings of a report (details supplied) that there are widespread and negative perceptions of airline safety culture among pilots working at airlines where atypical employment is common; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49338/17]

192. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review or if he has reviewed the workplace health and safety implications of atypical employment practices in the aviation sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43131/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 192 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the referenced Report examines the perceptions across Europe with regard to aviation safety. It is not a finding on actual safety performance. The Report also states clearly that European aviation remains an ultra-safe industry with a highly impressive safety record.

In Ireland, the IAA is responsible for the safety oversight of the civil aviation industry. The Authority has been found to be amongst the very best aviation regulatory bodies in the world, and it ensures that all Irish registered airlines comply fully with all safety regulations to the highest international safety standards. This includes international standards and requirements relevant to safety culture generally, including an airline's safety management and occurrence reporting systems, regardless of the type of business model or employment model operated within that company.

As explained in the response to Parliamentary Question 180 of 18 October 2017, there is no statistically based data within Europe to suggest that there is any correlation between business models and safety in aviation.

With regard to the Deputy's question concerning workplace health and safety implications of atypical employment models, I must advise that the question is outside the scope of my remit as it relates to workplace health and safety legislation. Airline companies have the same obligations under national and EU workplace health and safety laws as all other companies across every other industry. They are also bound by the same suite of employment laws. As I have explained in the House before, there are legally binding limitations on flight hours allowable for pilots and air crew, which are set under EU law and with which the IAA ensures Irish registered airlines comply.

Railway Stations

61. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the inconvenience that will be caused for disabled passengers if DART stations become unmanned; his further views on whether this is a fair manner in which to treat passengers with mobility issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49430/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has functional responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network and therefore I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 56.

Railway Stations Upgrade

63. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether there has been an outcome to the NTA review of additional car park facilities at Portmarnock Dart Station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49433/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply on the issue raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 55.

Road Network

65. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to examine road connectivity between Rosslare Europort through the south midlands, midlands and the west; his plans to link the M11, N24, M3, M4 and M7 in view of the importance in increasing direct accessibility with continental Europe and avoiding likely UK customs delays post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49422/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

My Department, in conjunction with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), is commencing a study into the use of the UK Land bridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of this research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK Land bridge at present, the likely consequences that Brexit will have on Land bridge usage and the various alternative options that may be viable. I expect this piece of research to be completed in Q1 of 2018. This research will assist future decision making in relation to transport links.

Ports Policy

66. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress that has been made to implement the recommendations of a review (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49353/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that Rosslare Europort is unique among the State owned ports as it is not a commercial company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated as a division of Iarnród Éireann. This is due to a complicated legislative history as the port technically forms part of an Anglo-Irish company dating back to the 19th Century known as the Rosslare and Fishguard and Harbours Company.

The status of the port, and whether its current status potentially inhibits its developments, was most recently considered in a strategic review, commissioned by my Department, and carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants.

Their report concluded that the creation of an independent port authority would be extremely difficult given the Port's complex legal structure. Instead, it was recommended that the Port remain in public ownership and that the possibilities for increased private sector involvement be investigated.

In order to assist Iarnród Éireann's overall consideration of how best to move forward, the company then engaged consultants to assess market interest. The assessment was largely positive in terms of the potential for increased private sector investment in the port; however, it did identify possible implementation issues due to the complicated legislative basis of the port.

Following that assessment my Department sought and received detailed advice from the Office of the Attorney General on the matter. That advice identified a number of legal issues with any such proposal and those issues remain under consideration by my Department.

Tourism Promotion

67. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the work to promote Ireland's Ancient East worldwide; the way in which it can be extended to counties, such as County Kildare, which have a rich heritage; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [49351/17]

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, such as Ireland's Ancient East, or the worldwide promotion of these initiatives. These are operational matters for the Boards and Management of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Sport and Recreational Development

68. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has engaged, or if he plans to engage, with relevant bodies regarding the possibility of the formation of an all-island soccer team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49287/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The organisation of sport in Ireland on an all-island basis has worked very successfully for a number of sports, most notably in the case of rugby.

The FAI (Football Association of Ireland) and Irish Football Association (Northern Ireland) are independent, autonomous bodies and any proposals regarding an all-island international soccer team would be a matter for those two organisations.

I am not aware that either organisation has sought re-structuring on an all-island basis. In any event, I would not have a direct role in such a matter and I have not been involved in any discussions of this nature.

Rail Network Expansion

69. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the extension of the rail line to Navan in County Meath would bring huge benefits to north County Meath both socially and economically; and the status of the extension. [49143/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As you may be aware the Navan Rail Link Project was originally included under the Transport 21 Initiative and was to be developed in two phases. Phase 1, comprising the Dunboyne Rail Line project was completed in 2013. Phase 2 was to provide for the extension of the Dunboyne line onwards to north Navan. This development together with a number of other transport projects was postponed in 2011 due to the economic and fiscal crisis.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The NTA published its Transport Strategy for the GDA for the period 2016-2035 last year following its approval by my predecessor. All the main transport corridors in the GDA were examined in the Strategy including the Navan to City Centre Corridor. The NTA concluded that based on current population and employment forecasts, the level of travel demand between Navan, Dunshaughlin and various stations to the city centre is insufficient to justify the development of a high-capacity rail link at this time. Instead it is proposed that an enhanced bus service will be provided along the corridor in conjunction with the development of a bus hub in Navan. The 2017 review of

the Capital Plan did not propose any change to this position and no funding was provided for the project in Budget 2018.

The NTA has indicated that the position will be reassessed as part of the next review of the GDA Transport Strategy and this will take account of the level of development in the catchment area over the next six years. The NTA has indicated that the corridor identified for a rail link to Navan should be protected from development intrusion in the meantime. If the review of the Transport Strategy concludes that a rail link is justified at that point, funding can be pursued in the context of the development of future Capital Investment Plans.

Search and Rescue Service Provision

70. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his Department's role in the supervision and oversight of the search and rescue services; and if he is satisfied with the maps and navigational equipment that is provided to these services. [49428/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Irish National Maritime Search and Rescue Framework, which was published in March 2010 by the then Minister for Transport, the Irish Coast Guard, as a division of the my Department, has responsibility for the coordination of maritime Search and Rescue (SAR), emergency response at sea and along the coasts and cliffs of Ireland, and on major inland lakes.

Under this Framework, the Safety Regulation Division of the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) have been assigned responsibility for the regulation and oversight of aircraft operations, including aeronautical Search and Rescue, within the State. In this context, the IAA issues a national SAR Approval to CHCI DAC, who are the operator contracted by the Irish Coast Guard to deliver this service. Through this practice, there is a system in place to validate the suitability of the CHCI SAR helicopters, crew, training and operational standards for SAR operations.

The Irish Aviation Authority has legal responsibility for validating and approving aeronautical charts for publication, as defined by international standards agreed under the International Civil Aviation Organisation. The Authority is a hugely respected organisation within international aviation, and it is subject to regular independent, outside audit.

The Authority has advised me that there is no reason whatsoever for the Irish Aviation community or emergency services to have any concerns about aeronautical maps and charts. All maps and charts produced meet the highest international standards.

Finally, I feel it important to emphasise that there is an active investigation currently under way into the R116 accident off the Mayo coast which is being conducted by the Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU). The AAIU investigates on a wholly independent basis and is charged under domestic law and international obligations with examining all relevant issues it determines are pertinent to the incident it is investigating. Whilst I understand the on-going public interest in this matter, it is vital that the AAIU is given the time and space to do its work and report on its findings.

As the investigation is still ongoing I can say no more about the issues surrounding it. Once the final report issues all findings and recommendations will be pursued with all relevant parties as a matter of priority.

Tourism Policy

71. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider development of a signature brand for historic and cultural tourism, along the lines of Ireland's Ancient East, which would cover the whole country; his views on such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49438/17]

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, including the experience brands such as Ireland's Ancient East. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Road Network

72. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of businesses in the north west due to the need to improve infrastructure, particularly the road network, to assist businesses remain competitive and to attract new business to the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49195/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues have been resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities.

The Government's Capital Plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. Maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway. The Capital Plan provides for significant investment in transport links impacting on the border region including:

- the N4 Collooney-Castlebaldwin upgrade scheme;
- a rolling improvement scheme on the N56 from Dungloe to Glenties and Inver to Mountcharles to strengthen links in Donegal, and
- subject to necessary consents, the N2 Slane Bypass on the N2 Dublin-Monaghan route.

The 57km Gort to Tuam PPP scheme has been completed and was opened officially on 27th September.

As regards preparatory work on a pipeline of future projects, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) announced in July that it is re-activating planning work on the N2 Clontibret to the Border Scheme to narrow down the route corridor to a single preferred route. In addition TII has committed to provide additional funding to develop an online upgrade of the N2, extending from North of Ardee to the south of the Castleblayney Bypass. The intention is to progress the preliminary design and the achievement of planning consent as soon as possible.

In relation to the TEN-T road network in Donegal, TII commissioned a Trans-European Transport Network Corridor Needs Study – Donegal which was completed by Halcrow Barry Consulting Engineers on behalf of Donegal County Council. The report recommends that priority should be afforded to the following three sections of the TEN-T route in Donegal:

- N15 Ballybofey – Stranorlar Urban Region
- N56/N13/N14 Letterkenny to Manorcunningham
- N14 Manorcunningham to Lifford/Strabane

Technical Advisors have been appointed to progress preparatory work on these three schemes and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has allocated €1m in 2017 to this work. TII intends to continue to advance the planning and design of these projects. The question of funding for construction will be considered in the context of the ten year investment framework which is to be developed with the National Planning Framework.

Road Network

73. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether a radical programme of works is required to upgrade the N2 road in view of serious and fatal accidents. [49146/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Within its annual budget the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as the N2) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

74. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the transport sector emissions targets that have been set by his Department; the actions that have been taken to meet these targets to date; the proposed steps that are agreed to be taken to meet these targets; the expected emissions from the transport sector for 2020, 2030 and 2050; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49347/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The responsibility for emissions reduction is a collective one and Ireland's emission reduction targets are national and not sectoral in nature. Our national objective, as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015 is to ensure transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. A reduction in carbon emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 has been collectively targeted across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors, in parallel with an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector.

The transport sector will play a strong role in contributing to our national emissions reduction effort. The EPA projects that by 2020 transport will have increased its sectoral share of greenhouse gas emissions to 29%, rising further to 32% by 2030. Though not unexpected - given Ireland's rising population and welcome return to economic growth with the corresponding rise in transport requirements - this projection nevertheless confirms that, without intervention, greenhouse gas emissions will unquestionably continue to rise. It places in sharp focus the significant challenge we face to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without hindering social improvement or financial recovery.

To decarbonise transport we are deploying a diverse range of measures, key among them being the increased uptake and operation of cleaner alternative fuels and technologies as well as promoting modal shift to public transport and active travel modes where possible. A wide-ranging set of transport mitigation measures and corresponding action points are detailed in the National Mitigation Plan and it is anticipated that these measures will develop further as climate research and technological innovations progress.

Although emissions from the transport sector are currently increasing, it is worthwhile noting that a number of successful mitigation measures have been introduced which have impacted and are positively addressing greenhouse gas emissions from transport. They include sustained investment in the public and sustainable transport network, implementation of EU vehicle standard regulations limiting tail pipe emissions, redesigning the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) and motor tax regimes to promote low carbon emitting vehicles, incentives to encourage alternative fuel and technologies, and the introduction of a Biofuel Obligation Scheme.

Yet, the transport sector needs to build on these and go further to address this challenge. A series of measures announced in Budget 2018 clearly reflected this Government's determination to make progress on decarbonising transport. I am pleased to have secured significant funding commitments to actively address the climate challenge on three key fronts. Firstly, we are working to enhance the capacity and quality of public transport to ensure that, as far as possible and practical, our increased transport demand is met by greener public transport (over €400m will be invested in public transport infrastructure in 2018 alone with a 4 year capital envelope of over €2.5bn). Secondly, we will invest over €100m in a multi-annual cycling and walking programme to support greater uptake of active travel. And, as recommended by the Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce, a suite of tax and expenditure measures was announced to clearly indicate the Government's commitment to a low-carbon electric vehicle future.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 40.

Road Network

76. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the A5 N2 project in terms of the capital plan review being conducted by his Department; his plans for moving this project forward in the context of the Brexit deadline and as part of the national planning framework plan as a catalyst for regional development and growth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49140/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an

additional £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues have been resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities.

The funding allocated to my Department as part of the Capital Plan Review includes financial provision for meeting the Government's commitment regarding the A5.

In relation to the N2, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Within its annual budget the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as the N2) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

77. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the tendering of bus routes in County Waterford. [49426/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 it is a statutory function of the National Transport Authority (NTA) to determine the appropriate mix of directly awarded and competitively tendered Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus services. Arising from this, it is the NTA's role to conduct the public procurement process relating to its decision to tender out of 10% of the PSO bus network, including the recent tendering of PSO services in Waterford.

I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Network

78. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure a substantial increase in the financial allocation to Monaghan County Council for the road works programme for 2018 in view of the deterioration of parts of the non-national road network. [49355/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Regional and Local Road allocations under the three main grant categories (Restoration Maintenance, Restoration Improvement and Discretionary Grant) are allocated based on the length of mileage of regional and local roads within the county.

It is expected that regional and local road allocations for 2018 will be notified to local au-

thorities in January 2018. In line with my Department's 2018 roads budget, an increase in allocations to local authorities is anticipated.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Funding

79. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding provided for 2018 to Transport Infrastructure Ireland for the upgrade of national primary and secondary roads respectively; when it is planned to agree a major works programme with TII for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49435/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. While the Revised Estimates Volume for 2018 has not yet been issued TII has been advised of its expected overall capital and current allocations for 2018. These are €434 million and €31.6 million respectively.

Within its allocation, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Air Services Provision

80. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the actions and statements of the IAA and CAR in respect of the cancellation of services by a large airline operator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49283/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The actions and statements of the CAR and the IAA in relation to the cancellation of services by the airline operator are matters for the agencies concerned having regard to their respective regulatory functions. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to each agency for direct reply. Please advise my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

On the basis of my contacts with both agencies, I am satisfied that they have properly discharged their regulatory functions in this instance.

Light Rail Projects

81. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the potential impact on the future of metro north of forced rezoning of residential lands in north County Dublin, in line with the new draft national planning framework; if he has discussed this matter with Transport Infrastructure Ireland; and his further views on the future of metro north. [49345/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The draft National Planning Framework (NPF) - which is expected to be finalised and agreed by Government shortly - recognises the statutory arrangements for transport planning in the Greater Dublin Area under the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the transport planning policy set out in the NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035. Indeed, the draft NPF includes a National Strategic Outcome to "Deliver the key public transport objectives of

the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035 by investing in projects such as New Metro North, DART Expansion Programme, BusConnects in Dublin and key bus based projects in the other cities and towns”.

Following consideration of the Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study and the recommendations of the NTA arising from this study, the Government decided in 2015 that a light-rail link is the optimum long term public transport solution on the Airport/Swords corridor. In addition, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to proceed with the metro scheme. Funding of over €700 million has been allocated under the Government’s Capital Plan 2016-2021 for for planning and design work with construction expected to commence in 2021 with a view to delivering the project by 2026/2027 within the 10 Year National Investment Plan that will be published shortly.

The NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have commenced preparatory work on the planning and design of new Metro North and a dedicated project Steering Group has been established which is meeting on a regular basis. The design and planning work being undertaken at present on the new Metro North project, will continue to use the most up-to-date information available on population and employment projections to ensure that the final design and service pattern is correctly calibrated to fully meet the transport needs of the corridor, to ensure that due consideration is given to Fingal County Council development objectives while noting that zoning decisions are a matter for council members. The NTA, in collaboration with TII, is undertaking an option analysis and selection study of possible metro alignments and station locations. Arising from this work a final route and station configuration will be established. It is my understanding that the NTA and TII expect that this process will be complete by the end of 2017, after which a public consultation process will be undertaken in 2018.

My Department will continue to engage with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the NTA to ensure alignment between the National Planning Framework and the Transport Strategy for the GDA.

Public Bike Schemes

82. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the nature of the roll-out contract for the public bike scheme in Galway city; the tender process; the name of the company awarded the contract; the details of the substitution company; if so, the tender process involved; the duration of the contract; the cost of same; the nature of the maintenance contract, including the tender process; the name of the company awarded the maintenance contract; the details of the substitution company; if so, the tender process involved; the duration of the maintenance contract; the cost of same; if the scheme has been effective; the user volume and trip volumes in comparison to other similar public bike schemes here; the cost-benefit analysis that has been undertaken on the scheme; the value of the sponsorship contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49348/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport, but I am not involved in the operation or contract arrangements for particular initiatives such as the public bikes scheme. The National Transport Authority (NTA) is the State bodies with responsibility for the development and implementation of the public bike schemes, so I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply with regard to this particular project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

83. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the new bridge at Ballina and Killaloe which is included in the capital programme 2016 to 2021 will be provided in view of the fact there is no information available as to the cost of the project or a timeframe for commencement and completion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49423/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is a matter for the local authority.

The Shannon Bridge Crossing at Killaloe is one of a number of schemes included in the Capital Plan 2016-2021 designed to address bottlenecks on the road network. The bridge is the 1st phase of the Shannon Crossing/Killaloe Bypass/R494 upgrade scheme. In planning the construction schedule for individual projects included in the Plan, account has to be taken of the annual budgets in the Capital Plan and the need to phase different sections of projects to manage the available budgets.

Following the conclusion of the judicial review relating to the Shannon crossing/Killaloe Bypass/R494 scheme, it is now a matter for the local authority (Clare County Council) to progress the scheme. Clare County Council has been provided with an allocation of €500,000 in 2017.

While a construction timetable has not been decided as yet, my Department will be liaising with Clare County Council in relation to the timing of the construction phases for the Shannon Crossing Section (Phase 1) and the Killaloe Bypass/R494 sections (Phase 2) of the overall scheme.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 56.

Tourism Promotion

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he sees opportunities for the further development of the tourism sector with particular reference to the maximisation of the promotion of this country as a conference location sector; his plans for particular initiatives in this regard and in the promotion of activity tourism such as greenways and the utilisation of this country's culture as a means of developing the tourism sector further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49437/17]

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, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

However, I am aware that Fáilte Ireland's Business Tourism Unit, operating under the brand name "Meet In Ireland", promotes Ireland as a leading conference and meeting destination. The team works collaboratively with key stakeholders to secure high profile business tourism events for Ireland.

My Department is currently developing a strategy for the future development of greenways

following a public consultation process earlier in the year. The strategy will provide a long term vision and framework upon which Ireland's greenways can be planned in a strategic manner ensuring the best possible return for State investment. I am pleased to have secured additional funding for greenways in the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, bringing the total amount available for the development of greenways in the period 2018 -2021 to almost €56m. I expect to be in a position to announce a new round of funding for the development of greenways in 2018, following completion of the greenways strategy.

Finally, cultural tourism is an intrinsic element of all the experience brands but it forms a major part of the appeal of Ireland's Ancient East, which seeks to build on the wealth of historical and cultural assets in the east and south of Ireland. Fáilte Ireland is continuing to promote Ireland's Ancient East in both domestic and international markets.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

86. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the transport infrastructure projects that are being advanced to facilitate the sustainable development of the Clonburris strategic development zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49136/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply of the 11th October 2017 to Dáil Question number 25 and subsequent National Transport Authority response of 19th October 2017. The position with regard to the Clonburris SDZ remains as outlined in those responses.

Traffic Management

87. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to establish a study on the use of the Dublin Port Tunnel with a view to encouraging more car traffic at peak times in order to reduce traffic jams on the M1 corridor, with particular emphasis on the pricing structure at peak times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49427/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

The Port Tunnel was built to facilitate Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) access to Dublin Port and to reduce HGVs in the city centre. That is the reason the toll structure was designed in the way it works.

However, I will ask TII to reply in more detail to the Deputy.

Road Traffic Legislation

88. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is a team in his Department working on the consolidation of Road Traffic Acts in view of the fact that the Taoiseach has said it should be a priority; if the Law Reform Commission is also involved in this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49138/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Road Traffic Acts are based at present on legislation dating from 1961, which has been updated numerous times. There is general agreement among experts in the legislation - whose views I share - that this legislation would benefit from being consolidated and updated.

The issue of consolidation has often been misunderstood. Consolidation is not a simple matter of taking all of the Road Traffic legislation currently in force and re-enacting it in a single Bill. It will be necessary to consider, point by point, whether the matters addressed in the legislation are in fact being addressed properly and in a manner appropriate to current circumstances. There would be little value in undertaking a project of consolidation only to replicate all that is already on the statute books. We would find ourselves having to amend and update the consolidation immediately and repeatedly. An exercise like that would be a waste of time and resources.

Beside updating the legislation where necessary, in cases where matters are already addressed satisfactorily in the current legislation, it would still be necessary to scrutinize that legislation to see if it could be better expressed. The project in question is large and will take a great deal of time. A reasonable estimate at this stage is that a team would need to be allocated to work on it for approximately three years.

I do not believe that the Law Reform Commission is the appropriate body to undertake this work. The Deputy may wish to note that the Commission operates on the basis of a multi-annual programme approved by the Government as a whole, and does not undertake such projects at the direction of an individual Minister.

My Department has, unavoidably, been working in recent years to update aspects of the Road Traffic Acts which require urgent updating. In light of the fact that my officials are currently working on a number of Bills, most of which are primarily focused on road safety, it is not possible to commence such a consolidation project at this time.

My priority is the progression of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2017. Following the passage of this Bill, I will give further consideration to the consolidation matter.

Road Projects Status

89. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of the A5; if he will report on his engagement with his counterparts in Northern Ireland on this project; the funding that will be made available for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49141/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an

additional £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues have been resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities.

In the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive, the North South Ministerial Council is not meeting at present. The North South Senior Officials Group is, however, continuing to meet regarding implementation of the commitments in the Fresh Start Agreement and my Department is represented on that Group.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 56.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 42.

Road Projects Status

92. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Bonagee link road project in County Donegal; the timeframe for this project to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49142/17]

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

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days. work.

Road Network

93. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to examine road connectivity between Rosslare Europort and the west of the country; his plans to link the M11, N24, M3, M4 and M7 in view of the importance of increasing direct accessibility between the west and continental Europe, avoiding likely UK customs delays post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49134/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

My Department, in conjunction with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), is commencing a study into the use of the UK Land bridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of this research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK Land bridge at present, the likely consequences that Brexit will have on Land bridge usage and the various alternative options that may be viable. I expect this piece of research to be completed in Q1 of 2018.

My officials will continue to work with the maritime sector and with other stakeholders to identify and plan for the implications of Brexit.

Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 56.

Air Accident Investigations

95. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views, and the actions taken by his Department, in response to recent media reports that indicate that concerns were raised repeatedly with a group (details supplied) in the past number of years regarding locator beacons on life jackets which were not installed correctly; if attention was drawn to the Irish Aviation Authority of these complaints; and if so, when it became aware of these complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49285/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is absolutely vital that all of the factors around the R116 crash are fully investigated by the expert aviation investigators in the Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU). The Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU) investigates on a wholly independent basis and is charged under domestic law and international obligations with examining all relevant issues it determines are pertinent to the incident it is investigating.

We owe it to the families and to the colleagues of the crew that the AAIU investigate this thoroughly and without outside interference or conjecture of any kind, and to report all findings for action across the world. The investigation is still ongoing. I can say no more about the issues surrounding it. Once the final report issues, I can assure you that all findings and recommendations will be pursued with all relevant parties as a matter of priority.

Cabinet Committee Meetings

96. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on Cabinet sub-committee D, infrastructure. [49179/17]

The Taoiseach: Cabinet Committee D covers housing, climate action, infrastructure investment and delivery, the National Planning Framework and the Ten Year Capital Plan. Among other issues, this Committee is providing political oversight of our efforts to tackle the challenges in housing and homelessness and our transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.

The next meeting of Cabinet Committee D is scheduled for tomorrow, 23 November 2017.

Following a review of Rebuilding Ireland, the Government has announced a number of additional measures. These include a range of measures in Budget 2018 involving increased expenditure allocations, taxation changes, and the establishment of Home Building Finance Ireland to provide additional finance to developers.

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has also announced further actions in relation to the rental market, and the planning system.

An allocation of €116 million in Budget 2018, an increase of €18 million on 2017, for homelessness will help address the increased demand for emergency homeless services and will assist in supporting homeless households with long-term and sustainable housing solutions.

The draft National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 – was published for consultation in September. The final version of the National Planning Framework will be published shortly, alongside the new Ten Year Capital Plan. This approach will provide clarity, coherence and certainty in relation to planning and capital expenditure, while facilitating a sustainable approach

to meeting Ireland's future investment needs.

Departmental Contracts Data

97. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the external contracts his Department has. [49418/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department liaises closely with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) on all matters related to public procurement and monitors all areas of expenditure on an ongoing basis to ensure that value for money is being achieved.

There are currently 21 external contracts in place for goods and services provided to my Department, as set out in the table.

My Department has availed of OGP framework agreements for a wide ranges of goods and services such as foreign travel management services; IT equipment; managed print services; taxi services; cleaning services and supplies; waste management services; printing; and stationery.

Supplier	Type	Expiry date
Unity Technology Solutions	Goods	16/12/2019
Fusio Limited	Services	30/04/2019
Quark Software INC	Services	31/12/2018
Quark Software INC	Services	30/11/2018
Agency Assessments Ireland	Services	23/10/2018
Anglo Printers Ltd	Services	27/07/2018
Ndevor Systems LTD t/a TextByNumbers Phorest	Services	22/07/2018
IT Force	Services	20/07/2018
Ceart Business Services	Services	01/03/2018
Grosvenor Services	Services	28/02/2018
Express Tech	Services	19/01/2018
Flextime Limited	Services	31/12/2017
Dublin Airport Authority PLC	Services	31/12/2017
Apex Fire	Services	31/12/2017
ASAP Couriers	Services	31/12/2017
Bewleys Limited	Services	31/12/2017
Europus Language Consultancy Company - Galway	Services	31/12/2017
EW Technologies Group	Services	31/12/2017
Munchies	Goods	31/12/2017
Parallel Information Technology - ptools SN 13436	Services	31/12/2017
Wheel, The (Rotha Teoranta)	Services	29/12/2017

Strategic Communications Unit

98. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff employed by the strategic communications unit; and their respective responsibilities and positions. [49483/17]

99. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the number of additional staff that are scheduled to be employed by the strategic communications unit in the next six months; and their respective responsibilities and positions. [49484/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 99 together.

There are seven staff working in the Strategic Communications Unit of my Department:

- One Director (equivalent to Assistant Secretary);
- Three Assistant Principal Officers;
- One Higher Executive Officer (equivalent);
- One Administrative Officer; and
- One Clerical Officer.

My Department is currently finalising the assignment of three Media and Communications Assistants (equivalent to Executive Officer) to the Strategic Communications Unit to fill existing vacancies through an open competition run by the Public Appointments Service.

In addition, my Department recently finalised a selection process to second experienced and qualified civil servants at Principal Officer, Assistant Principal Officer, Higher Executive Officer and Administrative Officer level to the Strategic Communications Unit.

The staffing of the Strategic Communications Unit, like any other section of my Department, is a matter for the Secretary General and the senior management of the Department to consider.

Strategic Communications Unit

100. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the budget allocated to the strategic communications unit for the first year of its existence, including salaries. [49485/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department's budget for 2018 has decreased by 2% compared to 2017. €5 million has been allocated to the Strategic Communications Unit of my Department for 2018. My Department does not delegate salary budgets to individual divisions/units. The salaries of the staff in the Strategic Communications Unit will be met from my Department's 2018 administrative salary budget.

All costs (including salary costs) incurred in 2017 by the Strategic Communications Unit will be met from within the existing resources of my Department.

Strategic Communications Unit

101. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if his departmental officials sought information or advice from other governments in respect of the establishment of the strategic communications unit. [49486/17]

102. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the research that was undertaken by his

Department regarding the establishment of the strategic communications unit; and if this research will be published. [49487/17]

103. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the relationship between the strategic communications unit and the Government Press Office. [49488/17]

104. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if the strategic communications unit has engaged through social media or other online platforms to carry sponsored content; and the costs associated with same. [49489/17]

105. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the number of meetings of the strategic communications unit that have taken place which have been attended by him and his officials, respectively. [49490/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 to 105, inclusive, together.

As part of the planning process in setting up the Strategic Communications Unit the Director and a member of staff in the Strategic Communications met with their counterparts in the UK and the Netherlands to learn at first hand how both countries went about the streamlining and optimisation of government communications, from the perspective of the citizen. Both countries have adopted a whole of Government approach to communications with the citizen placed at the centre.

Their communication systems aim to simplify how government information is communicated to the public so that it is delivered in a coherent and accessible manner. The SCU will continue to consult with international counterparts to seek to adhere to international best practice.

The decision to set up the SCU was informed by a need to streamline how Government communicates with its citizens. As an initial step, my Department conducted some research on existing communications activities, including the range of campaigns, brands and channels of communication used by different agencies, which have built up over many years, under successive governments. This research is ongoing and will be used by civil service management to help frame the work plan of the new unit.

The initial results of that research will be published shortly. The former Merrionstreet (GIS) function is integrated within the Strategic Communications Unit; the Government Press Office continues to operate as before in dealing with day -to-day media queries, under the direction of the Government Press Secretary.

A key part of the modernisation of Government communications is the greater use of social media. Recent initiatives in my department such as videos relating to Ireland's Rugby World cup bid, information about going back to school, the budget and Treatment Benefits cost approximately €21,895 in total. Sponsored posts appeared on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

I meet with the Director of the Strategic Communications Unit and all of the senior officials in my Department on a regular basis as part of the sub group of the Civil Service Management Board. The Strategic Communications Unit is a unit within my Department and, therefore, meets with Departmental officials on a regular and ongoing basis.

EU Summits

106. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the EU summit on 17

November 2017; the issues that were discussed. [49553/17]

107. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if there was discussion at the EU summit on the roadmap relating to the issues affecting the Border here in view of the fact that Northern Ireland is leaving the Single Market and the customs union. [49554/17]

108. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he had bilateral meetings at the EU summit meeting on 17 November 2017; the leaders he met; and the issues that were discussed. [49555/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 to 108, inclusive, together.

I attended the European Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 17 November. I was accompanied by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, and the Minister for European Affairs, Helen McEntee.

EU Heads of State and Government were joined by social partners and other stakeholders for an open discussion on how to promote fair jobs and growth in the future. There was a plenary session, followed by three parallel working sessions. I participated in the second, on the subject of fair employment and working conditions.

At the Summit, the Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights was formally signed by the Presidents of the Commission and Parliament, and on behalf of the Council by the Estonian Prime Minister, Mr Ratas.

The Social Summit was followed by a working lunch for Leaders chaired by European Council President Donald Tusk. This was the first in a series of discussions under his Leaders' Agenda, as endorsed by the October European Council, and it focused on education and culture.

There was no discussion on Northern Ireland at the Social Summit in Gothenburg.

In the margins of the Summit, I met with Prime Minister May. We discussed the ongoing political situation in Northern Ireland and agreed that our two governments would continue to engage with the parties to support and encourage them to reach agreement on the formation of a Northern Ireland Executive.

On Brexit, I reiterated the position of the EU 27 that greater clarity and confidence on how a hard border is to be avoided was needed before we could say that sufficient progress had been made to allow negotiations to move to Phase two.

I have consistently maintained that protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process is a key priority, not just for Ireland but for all remaining 27 Member States. Given that the UK Government has said that the UK should leave the Single Market and the Customs Union, the onus is on it to indicate how the commitment to avoiding a hard border is to be realised in that context.

Strategic Communications Unit

109. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if funding was allocated from other Departments to fund the strategic communications unit; and the amounts his Department received from each Department. [49556/17]

110. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the details of the tender for the research and insight survey which was issued by the strategic communications unit that drafted same;

the changes that were made to same subsequently; and the reason these were made. [49557/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 and 110 together.

The costs associated with the Strategic Communications Unit, since its establishment in 2017, will be met from my Department's Budget. No monies have been sought from other Departments to fund the Unit. But it is intended that the Unit will drive savings across all Departments overtime through efficiencies generated by:

- cross-Governmental collaboration on major campaigns,
- more efficient use of technology platforms,
- consolidated media buying,
- efficient third-party contract management,
- rationalising design projects,
- streamlining participation in national events,
- increased communication capacity within Departments.

In 2018, my Department's budget has decreased by 2% compared to this year. The Unit's budget of €5 million is a reallocation of existing resources within my Departments' budget for 2018.

My Department is about to award a contract for a Research services. Such work is a normal part of a professional communications function and has been undertaken by other public bodies in the past. The research will cover the public's view of Government, their perception of services provided by Government and their knowledge of the range and quality of those services and what the role of Government should be in their lives, with a view to helping us communicate more effectively with citizens.

However, in the light of concerns raised in relation to the scope of the research, my Department reviewed the tender and a number of clarifications have been made:

- the data to be collected is from the general public, from young people to older people; where possible the views of those under 18 are to be included; it will not therefore be confined to "Irish voters aged 18 or over"
- the definition of "Government" includes Departments, Agencies, Offices, state services and the work of the public sector and explicitly excludes anything party political or individual Ministers
- while it is standard that the intellectual property rights of research lie with my Department, as the client, rather than the research company, it will be published and available to everyone.

Industrial Relations

111. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a company (details supplied) has refused to implement Labour Court recommendation LCR 21574 recommending enhanced redundancy terms in respect of employees working for a subsidiary being made redundant; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that the company refused to allow the workers to be

represented by a union of their choice and that in rejecting the appeal against the workers being made redundant the company described the Labour Court recommendation as inappropriate and out of line with company policy and stated that the workers' involvement in the union was a contributory factor to the negative outcome of the appeal; and if she will consider contacting the company to express their views on its treatment of workers and apparent contempt for the State's industrial relations machinery. [49531/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In reply to parliamentary question no. 160 put down by the deputy on 7 November last, I outlined the position in relation to the Labour Court Recommendation 21574 referred to by the deputy.

Labour Court Recommendation LCR 21574 was made under the Industrial Relations Acts 1946 to 2015 and published on the Court's website at *www.workplacerelations.ie*. The Court's Recommendation followed a referral to the Court under Section 20(1) of the Industrial Relations Act, 1969. While referrals under that Section of the Act requires the referring party to agree to be bound by the Court's Recommendation, there is no obligation on the other party to be bound by, or to accept, the Recommendation. In the current instance, the responding party, as is their right, did not attend the hearing of the Court and the Court did not have the benefit of their views in framing its Recommendation.

On the separate issue of trade union recognition that the deputy has raised, it is the case that Article 40 of the Irish Constitution guarantees the right of citizens to form associations and unions. It has been established, however, in a number of legal cases that the constitutional guarantee of the freedom of association does not guarantee workers the right to have their union recognized for the purpose of collective bargaining.

It has been the consistent policy of successive Irish Governments to promote collective bargaining through the laws of this country and through the development of an institutional framework supportive of a voluntary system of industrial relations that is premised upon freedom of contract and freedom of association. There is an extensive range of statutory provisions designed to back up the voluntary bargaining process.

The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 which came into effect on 1 August 2015 provides an improved framework in this area to facilitate employees' right to engage in collective bargaining. The 2015 Act provides a clear and balanced mechanism by which the fairness of the employment conditions of workers in their totality can be assessed where collective bargaining does not take place.

It ensures that such workers, aided by a trade union even where the trade union is not formally recognized by the employer, can advance claims about remuneration and conditions of employment and have these determined by the Labour Court based on comparisons with similar companies. It provides definitions of key terms as well as guidelines to help the Labour Court identify if internal bargaining bodies are genuinely independent of their employer, and it provides policies and principles for the Labour Court to follow when assessing the comparability of the remuneration and conditions in dispute.

Ireland's system of industrial relations is essentially voluntary in nature, and responsibility for the resolution of industrial disputes between employers and workers, rests primarily with the employer, the workers and their representatives.

As an independent adjudicative body, the Labour Court has discharged its statutory function in this matter and as Minister, I have no function in relation to this issue.

VAT Rate Application

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which the 9% VAT rate continues to facilitate the hospitality sector and the customer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49632/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 9% reduced rate of VAT is reviewed annually in the context of the Budget, including the costs and economic benefits and the additional revenue that could be raised by bringing the rate back to 13.5%. Revenue's most recent estimate for reverting the reduced 9% VAT rate back to 13.5% is that it would bring in extra revenue of €491 million.

In terms of economic benefit, employment in the accommodation and food service sector has grown significantly since the introduction of the 9% VAT rate. Employment in these sectors has increased gradually each year since 2011, with an increase of over 35% in the period of Q2 2011 to Q1 2017 – an increase of 40,500 jobs in the sector. The rate of increase in employment in this sector was significantly greater than the overall level of employment increase. In terms of overseas trips to Ireland by non-residents, the number of trips increased from 6.5 million in 2011 to 9.6 million in 2016, an increase of 48%. However, these benefits could be attributed to other factors, such as the general and very strong recovery in the economy and better economic performance in the target markets.

I decided in Budget 2018 not to make any change to the 9% VAT rate as it continues to benefit the tourism sector throughout the country and any change in the rate could impact greatly on the tourism sector outside of the capital. I am also conscious of the impact the decline in the value of Sterling is having on UK visitor numbers and how any increase in the VAT rate might exacerbate this.

However, I accept that the 9% VAT rate must be subject to ongoing analysis. In this context I have asked my Department to undertake a comprehensive study of all aspects of the 9% VAT rate ahead of next year's Budget.

Stamp Duty

113. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a transitional period for the new rate of stamp duty until 31 December 2017 in order to allow all deals already commenced with deposit paid to be concluded with regard to the proposed rise in stamp duty from 2% to 6% for commercial properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49520/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The rate of stamp duty on commercial property was increased from 2% to 6% by way of a Budget Day Financial Resolution in respect of all relevant conveyances executed on or after 11 October 2017. Finance Bill 2017 contains transitional measures in relation to extending the previous 2% rate for certain transactions that would have reached an advanced stage in the sale process before Budget day on 10 October 2017. The 2% rate of stamp duty applies where the seller and purchaser entered into a contract that was binding on both of the parties before 10 October 2017 and where the conveyance is executed on or before 31 December 2017. I do not propose to broaden the scope of these transitional measures.

It is not possible to be definitive about whether the payment of a deposit would mean that a purchaser had entered into a binding contract for the purchase of a property or whether the

deposit was merely a stage in the process leading up to a binding contract. If purchasers are in doubt about the status of a transaction they should consult with their legal advisors to determine whether they had, in fact, entered into binding contracts before 10 October 2017 and, indeed, whether the conveyances will be executed on or before 31 December this year.

State Aid Investigations

114. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if the State has received part or all of the sum of €13 billion tax plus interest from a company (details supplied); if he has consulted with the Revenue Commissioners on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49524/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland has never accepted the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid Decision.

However, we have always been clear that the Government is fully committed to ensuring that recovery of the alleged Apple State aid takes place without delay and has committed significant resources to ensuring this is achieved as quickly as possible whilst ensuring that the interests of the Irish taxpayer are adequately protected.

Officials and experts from across the State have been engaged in intensive work to ensure that the State complies with all its recovery obligations as soon as possible.

Ireland has made significant progress on this complex issue and is close to the establishment of an escrow fund in compliance with all relevant Irish constitutional and European Union law.

Public Procurement Regulations

115. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that around 40% of the clients of a company (details supplied) here are in the public sector and that the value of the company's contracts with Government Departments is approximately €139 million; if he will consider reviewing the company's public sector contracts in view of same; and his plans to revise public procurement regulations to ensure that companies in receipt of public contracts conform to best practice with regard to labour rights and respect for the State's industrial relations mechanisms. [49531/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers transparency and value for money outcomes.

In addition, public procurement regulations require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. The criterion upon which contracting authorities may exclude applicants from the award procedure of public contracts is set out in Regulation 57 of S.I. No. 284 of 2016 - European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016 – transposing Article 57 of Directive 2014/24/EU – the EU Procurement Directive.

To ensure that Procurement rules can be carried out in a consistent manner across the EU, the Directives normally require a formal final judgement before a contracting authority can legitimately take any action against a potential supplier. Before an applicant, in relation to certain breaches, is excluded, the applicant may make a case and provide supporting evidence as to why it should not be excluded. The contracting authority must consider this evidence before

deciding whether to exclude or include an applicant. In addition, the qualifying tenderer must submit signed declarations stating that none of the circumstances outlined in Regulation 57 of S.I. No. 284 or Article 57 of 2014/24/EU apply.

The departments or agencies with primary policy responsibility are best placed to develop, implement, enforce and amend, as appropriate, legislation covering the issues raised by the Deputy. In this case, employment law and its enforcement, are matters for my colleagues in the Departments of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Contracting authorities are responsible for holding information on their suppliers and managing their contracts. The Deputy will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on specific tenders or contracts.

Flood Prevention Measures

116. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when funding will be available for flood defence measures for north Louth from Omeath to Dundalk and Dundalk to Clogherhead to upgrade coastal flood defence measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49547/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding is the Office of Public Works (OPW) Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of Flood Risk Management Plans.

Seven Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) have been identified in County Louth as follows: Baltray, Annagassan, Ardee, Dundalk & Blackrock South, Carlingford & Greenore, Termonfeckin and Drogheda. The feasible measures both structural and non-structural identified for these AFAs are contained in the final plans for the East and North Western – Neagh Bann CFRAM studies.

These Plans are currently undergoing an independent review of the strategic level environmental assessments by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Once this independent review of all Plans is completed and observations addressed, I would hope by the end of this year to seek the approval from the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for the Flood Risk Management Plans. Thereafter, I would hope to announce the proposed structural measures contained within the Plans that will, over the coming years, be taken to detailed design to protect those communities at assessed risk.

Outside of the CFRAM study areas, Louth County Council has responsibility for investigating and addressing issues of coastal protection and flooding in their area and can apply for funding to carry out proposed works under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. Any application received will be assessed under the scheme's eligibility criteria. Application forms and related guidelines are available on the OPW website under Flood Risk Management. <http://www.opw.ie/en/floodriskmanagement/operations/minorflood-workscoastalprotectionscheme/>

Higher Education Schemes

117. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the Department of the Taoiseach's strategy statement and its commitment to meet the demographic challenges in higher education. [49414/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society and I have taken a number of steps towards achieving this important objective.

As committed to in the Programme for Government, I have referred the Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills. The Report sets out a number of proposals to develop a long term sustainable funding model. I look forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations. This will assist in facilitating informed decision-making for the future direction of funding for higher education.

While the Committee are undertaking this important work, I have been working in the interim to secure additional funding for higher education to address, inter alia, rising demographics. This commitment is reflected in the recent Budget 2018 announcement in which the higher education sector will benefit from a total investment package of €60m in additional funding in 2018. This funding is on top of the €36.5m that I secured for 2017 and which is being provided again in 2018. In total, we will be investing €100m more in higher education in 2018 than in 2016. This additional funding will allow for targeted initiatives in higher education and will allow for places to be provided for 2,100 additional students in 2018.

In Budget 2017, the Government increased Exchequer funding to higher education by €36.5 million and announced a consultation exercise to consider an Employer-Exchequer Investment Mechanism. This reflected the recommendation in the Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding of Higher Education that a structured contribution from employers should form a key element of future funding for higher education as employers are major beneficiaries of higher education.

Following a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer Investment Mechanism earlier this year, it was announced in Budget 2018 that the National Training Fund levy will be raised by 0.1% in 2018 from 0.7% to 0.8% and by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020. This measure allows for additional expenditure of €47.5 million from the Fund in 2018. The 2019 and 2020 levy increases will be subject to the implementation of the necessary reforms to ensure that employers have a greater role in determining the priorities and the strategic direction of the Fund.

In addition, the Exchequer will also make an additional investment of €17m in 2018. Together this will facilitate an increase of €64.5 million in the Department's expenditure ceiling. This will be used to fund initiatives in the higher education system including targeted skills programmes, performance and innovation funding, technological university development and apprenticeship costs in the higher education sector.

Also, following the review of the Capital Plan, a total of €357m in capital funding is now available for investment in higher education over the period 2018-2021.

As set out in the Programme for Government, this comprehensive approach is being taken in order to achieve a sustainable funding model for the higher education sector going forward. It will be important to build broad political and societal consensus in realising this goal and my Department and I continue to work towards that end.

Schools Building Projects Status

118. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of new school buildings for a school (details supplied); his views on the acquisition of land; if the extension of the school is a more likely prospect in the short term as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49499/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently finalising its plans for capital expenditure in 2018. Building projects, including the project for the school to which the Deputy refers, will be considered in that context.

Officials from my Department will shortly be in contact with the school regarding the time-frame for progression of its project.

Minor Works Scheme Applications

119. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a grant for a school (details supplied) in County Longford will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49500/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The normal practice is for the Minor Works Grant to be announced towards the end of the year if funding permits.

Over the next number of weeks the issue of the Minor Works Grant 2017/2018 will be considered in the context of my Department's overall capital position.

School Patronage

120. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is planned to establish an Educate Together school in Fermoy, County Cork. [49523/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector recommended that demand for patronage diversity should be met in areas of stable population by divesting patronage of existing schools where there is evidence of parental demand for change. Following surveys conducted by my Department in areas of stable population, sufficient demand emerged in 28 areas, including the Fermoy area. Under this patronage divesting process, ten new schools have opened from 2013 to 2016.

As the Deputy may be aware following discussions on patronage divesting with education stakeholders and patron bodies in 2016, on the 30th January 2017, I announced new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area. I believe that the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system with a target of reaching 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030.

In tandem with the implementation of the schools reconfiguration process, my Department is continuing to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in the areas already identified, including Fermoy.

Site Acquisitions

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the need for a site for a school (details supplied) in order that it can open as planned in 2018. [49534/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a project to provide permanent accommodation for the school to which she refers is included on my Department's Capital Programme.

Officials in my Department have been liaising with officials in the relevant local authority in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable permanent site for this school and this process is ongoing at present.

In the meantime, my Department is continuing to work in close co-operation with the Patron to facilitate the opening of this school in suitable interim accommodation.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

122. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the grant opportunities available for a mature student who wishes to return to education to complete a masters in teaching. [49558/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Financial supports are currently available for those postgraduate students who meet the eligibility criteria of the Student Grant Scheme.

I secured additional funding in Budget 2017 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students. In addition postgraduate students who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible to have their post graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit of €6,270.

Alternatively, a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of their fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2017/18 academic year, increasing relative to the number of family dependents.

In addition, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended.

Tax relief also is available on postgraduate tuition fees. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners.

Schools Building Projects Status

123. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school building project (details supplied) in County Dublin will complete stage 2B; the timeframe for this project to be completed in view of the fact that planning permission was granted 18 months ago in May 2016. [49566/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2(b), which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of Tender Documents. All statutory applications have been secured.

The Brief Change Request for the project was received by my Department. However, on initial review it was found that the documents submitted were incomplete and further information was requested and is awaited from the School and its Design Team.

When these outstanding documents are received and reviewed and a determination has been made on the Brief Change Request, the Design Team will be in a position to finalise the Stage 2(b) Report. Upon receipt and review of this report my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Junior Cycle Reform

124. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for changing the junior certificate education system when there is conflicting evidence as to the merits of this change. [49639/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), is the statutory body with responsibility for matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum. Findings from research commissioned by the NCCA showed that the quality of engagement – with the schools, with teachers and with learning – is central to this phase of education. ESRI research highlighted that a number of students were not progressing in first year, more were disengaging in second year and that were also students not developing their particular skills and interests. These findings were further underpinned when the OECDs Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for Irish 15 year olds were published, showing a decline in reading and maths scores. These combined findings indicated that the junior cycle in the existing format did not meet the needs of students and a failure to reform the junior cycle would see a continuation of this decline.

The new Framework for Junior Cycle gives students the opportunity to develop a wider range of knowledge and skills to equip them for further learning, for work, for responsible and active citizenship and for healthy living. It gives students better learning opportunities and recognises non-academic achievement.

Brexit Documents

125. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the working paper on Article 50 relating to dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland circulated on 8 November 2017. [49413/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am not going to comment on the detail of internal EU working documents tabled in Brussels. However, both the EU and Ireland have been clear about the current state of play on negotiations on the priority exit issues, including the Irish issues.

There is nothing new emerging about EU positions on Ireland and Northern Ireland; the

principles set out in the EU Guidelines for the negotiations and subsequent papers strongly acknowledge Ireland's concerns and priorities.

The Government has also been consistent in what we require.

At this point in the negotiations, it is entirely appropriate that the EU would seek further clarity on UK positions and call on the UK to provide strong political assurances and tangible commitments ahead of any decision on whether sufficient progress has been achieved on the Irish specific issues that recognize the unique situation on the island of Ireland, and that flexible and imaginative solutions will be required.

Ireland is working closely with the Commission Task Force to advance progress on Irish issues in the negotiations with the UK. The EU is united in the negotiations and fully behind the excellent work being done by its Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, and his team.

Diplomatic Representation

126. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to open an Irish embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia; if Georgia is included in plans to double the Irish diplomatic footprint by 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49482/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The doubling of Ireland's global footprint by 2025 commenced with the recent Government decisions to open new Embassies in Santiago, Chile; Bogotá, Colombia; Amman, Jordan; and Wellington, New Zealand; and new Consulates General in Vancouver, western Canada and Mumbai, India, on a phased basis from 2018. This will expand Ireland's diplomatic network to 65 Embassies, 7 multilateral missions, 13 Consulates General and one Representative office.

The locations for any possible new missions are considered by the Government and identified on the basis of where they would have the greatest impact and the greatest potential to deliver in terms of the State's economic and political interests and provide clear benefits for the State.

At present, Ireland's bilateral relationship with Georgia is fostered on a concurrent basis through our Embassy in Sofia. The question of opening a resident diplomatic mission in Georgia will be considered in the context of the wider plan to augment our network to 2025.

Garda Reform

127. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to remove the primary responsibility for security from the remit of the office of the Garda Commissioner and An Garda Síochána; the engagements there have been with senior Garda officers on such a proposal and by whom; the alternative structure envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49480/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, earlier this year the Government established the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland to undertake an independent, comprehensive examination of all aspects of policing in the State. By definition this includes all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána - community safety, security and immigration. The Commission is also to examine the full range of bodies that have a role in providing oversight and accountability for their activities; the Policing Authority, the Garda Inspectorate, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, my

Department and the Government. The terms of reference require the Commission to bring forward proposals addressing five themes:

- structures and management arrangements required for the most effective delivery of policing (including all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána),
- appropriate composition, recruitment and training of personnel,
- culture and ethos of policing,
- appropriate structures for oversight and accountability, and
- legislative framework for policing.

In relation to the theme of structures I would draw the Deputy's attention to the specific term of reference which requires the Commission to bring forward proposals in relation to the most appropriate structures for delivering all aspects of policing, whether a unitary structure or otherwise.

The terms of reference also call on the Commission to have regard to:

- existing and emerging issues identified as key challenges for Ireland's model of policing,
- best practices in the policing models of other countries focused towards greater effectiveness and efficiency, and fostering public confidence in policing,
- previous reports concerning policing in Ireland,
- any specific challenges to delivering consistent structural and cultural reform in policing.

The terms of reference require the Commission to consult widely in the course of its work, including with the public and civic society and any other bodies or individuals it considers appropriate. In line with this requirement, the Commission has launched a consultation process via its website and is encouraging individuals and organisations to share their views on all issues relevant to the Commission's terms of reference as an important input to the Commission's report.

The Commission is to report by September 2018 and it may, in accordance with its terms of reference, bring forward immediate proposals and rolling recommendations for implementation that it considers are required to be addressed in the short-term and in advance of its final report.

I met with the Chair of the Commission, Ms Kathleen O'Toole, very recently and she has updated me on their work to date. The Commission has met with a wide range of key stakeholders including An Garda Síochána, the Garda Inspectorate, the Policing Authority and my Department. It has also engaged with policing and security practitioners in other jurisdictions to gain insights into other policing models and oversight arrangements. Members of the Commission also met political representatives in the Houses recently to hear their views. I understand that the Commission will continue to engage with bodies key to the future of policing in Ireland over the coming months. To date the Commission has made no recommendations with regard to how An Garda Síochána should be structured into the future.

It is important that the Commission be afforded the time to complete the important and challenging task that has been set for it. I look forward to receiving the Commission's final report by next September and any interim reports that it may make in the meantime.

Departmental Funding

128. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding provided to an organisation (details supplied) for the past six years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49586/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): My Department provided funding to the organisation in question as outlined in the table. (For part of 2011, this function was within the remit of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.) This funding was mostly used for core costs.

Year	Amount
2011	€528,000
2012	€350,000
2013	€300,000
2014	€350,000
2015	€300,000
2016	€400,000

The allocation for the organisation this year is €480,000.

Immigration Controls

129. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he plans to dispense with the need for holders of diplomatic passports from the Republic of Georgia to apply for a visa for the purpose of visiting Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49467/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that requirements for which countries are visa required to come to Ireland are kept under regular review in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. As indicated previously, there are no plans to implement the change referred to by the Deputy.

My Department pursues a strategy of co-ordination and co-operation on visa issues with the United Kingdom in the context of the Common Travel Area (CTA). This is exemplified by the operation of the British Irish Visa Scheme in China and India which allows for travel to and around Ireland and the UK on a single visa.

As part of this continued co-operation, the matter of alignment of those States whose citizens are visa required is also kept under review. The greater the extent of alignment between the two jurisdictions, the greater the opportunity to increase the numbers of tourism and business visits to the CTA. At present, both Ireland and the UK require citizens of Georgia to be in possession of a visa for the purpose of visiting their jurisdiction and any proposals for change will also need to take this into consideration.

Naturalisation Applications

130. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for naturalisation; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49475/17]

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 naturalisation referred to by the Deputy was refused for reasons provided to the person concerned and their legal representative in a letter issued on 23 March 2017 advising of the decision.

A new application for naturalisation was received in May 2017 from the person concerned. Processing of this application is on-going and it will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

Garda Deployment

131. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in Tallaght Garda station by position (details supplied), in tabular form. [49478/17]

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.

The Deputy will be aware that Tallaght Garda Station forms part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R.) South Division. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Gardaí assigned to the D.M.R. South Division on 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available was 526 of whom 31 are assigned to Detective duties. There are also 22 Garda Reserves and 34 civilians attached to the DMR South Division. I am further informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of Tallaght Garda Station on 30 September was 173 Gardaí including 21 Community Garda.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the strength of Tallaght Garda Station by Rank as on 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available, is as set out in the table.

Strength of Tallaght Station by Rank 30 September 2017

Garda	Sergeant	Insp	Supt	TOTAL
149	18	5	1	173

Family Reunification Data

132. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of family reunification applications under the Refugee Act 1996 granted and refused by month to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49479/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As a refugee may include a number of family members in his or her application for family reunification there can be multiple outcomes to any particular application, with some family members approved and some refused following an examination of the application. Statistics are therefore maintained on the number of decisions made on the subjects of an application rather than on the number of applications per se.

The table provides the numbers of persons granted and refused family reunification under the provisions of the Refugee Act by month to date in 2017:

Month	Granted	Refused
January	42	1
February	10	44
March	84	19
April	31	5
May	38	1
June	59	22
July	10	3
August	71	5
September	12	4
October	8	57
November	12	16
TOTAL	377	177

Refugee Data

133. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average amount of time it is taking to get a first instance decision on a protection application from the International Protection Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49492/17]

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

At the end of October 2017, there were some 5,000 applications awaiting processing in the International Protection Office (IPO). The majority of these applications were made before the commencement of the 2015 Act but were not finalised by the former Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) by that date. These applications must be processed by the IPO under the transitional provisions of the 2015 Act. Various categories of cases reverted to the IPO including asylum appeals transferred from the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal and asylum and subsidiary protection cases transferred from the former ORAC. This has added significantly to the IPO's caseload.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that considerable progress has been made by the IPO in getting the new single procedure process up and running. To date, the IPO has scheduled over 2,000 single procedure interviews (including in respect of EU relocation cases). More than 150 additional interviews have been scheduled in the IPO for the coming weeks with more interviews being scheduled on a daily basis. Some 1,400 recommendations/decisions in respect of international protection and permission to remain have also been made by the IPO. This in-

cludes some 600 recommendations in respect of the grant of international protection.

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

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

Coroners Service

134. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will meet with persons (details supplied) following the recent debate on the Coroners (Amendment) Bill 2016 in Seanad Éireann. [49509/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Coroners (Amendment) Bill 2016, a Private Members Bill was presented at Second Stage in Seanad Éireann on 18 October, 2017 by Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn. It proposed to provide for the possibility of a verdict of Iatrogenic Suicide at a coroner's inquest. The primary motivation for the Bill derived from the tragic experience of the family of Jake McGill Lynch.

While accepting that the Senator's intentions were well motivated, the Government could not accept the Bill as such would risk its use at inquest as being interpreted as apportioning some liability on the medical practitioner who may have prescribed any form of treatment or medication to the deceased person prior to taking his or her own life. As the inquest is an inquisitorial process, it is not permitted to consider questions of civil or criminal liability under section 30 of the Coroners Act 1962.

The Government had received the advice of the Office of the Attorney General on the Bill to the effect that to introduce a verdict of iatrogenic suicide at inquest would be legally unsound.

The Coroners Society of Ireland indicated that it is very much opposed to this proposal, not least given that it might require coroners to reach verdicts that would infer liability on a medical practitioner.

I believe that a sufficient range of verdicts is available to coroners to draw on in the context of the cases envisaged by the Private Members Bill including those of suicide, open or medical misadventure.

While I express again my deepest condolences to the family I must make it clear, that the Government does not propose to change the law in this regard.

That said, I have no objections to meeting with the family at a suitable date.

Immigration Data

135. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of adults and children who have been granted their stamp four visa or leave to remain but who remain in direct provision or other non-permanent accommodation funded by his Department on the first day of each month in 2017. [49530/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The breakdown of the data in the format requested by the Deputy is not available. Our data system is not designed in such a way that that we can provide this information, retrospectively, as at the first of each month.

I can advise the Deputy that as of 1 January 2017 a total of 635 persons who had been granted international protection (317) or leave to remain (318) were residing in Direct Provision accommodation or in an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC). As of 14 November 2017, there were 639 persons with status residing in Direct Provision or an EROC, 430 people of whom had been granted international protection and 209 of whom had been granted leave to remain. The Deputy will be aware that Direct Provision accommodation is intended for and offered to those who have made applications for international protection, which are being examined. As a discretionary measure, those with international protection status or permission to remain are given time to assist them to transition to mainstream housing.

Migrant Integration

136. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and names of local authorities that have a published migrant integration strategy; the number of local authorities without such a strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49548/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I have no responsibility in relation to the actions of local authorities. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have sought the relevant information from the Local Government Management Agency. A survey was undertaken of the 31 local authorities and 10 have confirmed that their migrant integration strategies have been published.

19 local authorities do not currently have a migrant integration strategy.

Development of Local Authorities' integration strategies will be undertaken within the framework of the National Strategy. Action 52 of the Migrant Integration Strategy - A Blueprint for the future, which was published on 7 February 2017, provides for the updating of integration strategies by local authorities over the lifetime of the Strategy i.e. from 2017 to 2020. A Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee has been established to support the process of implementing the Migrant Integration Strategy. The Committee, which comprises representatives of relevant Government Departments, State Agencies and the NGO sector, met for the second time in October 2017 and are due to meet again in January 2018. Progress on the implementation of the actions in the Strategy will be reviewed at the end of 2018 and a report prepared for Government.

Departmental Staff Data

137. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the staff that have been seconded from her Department to the National Museum of Ireland since

2007; the position of each; and the dates of their seconded positions. [49481/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that no staff have been seconded from my Department to the National Museum of Ireland since the establishment of my Department in June 2011.

My understanding is that following the establishment of the National Museum of Ireland on 3 May 2005 staff who were not engaged for the performance of duties exclusively in the Museum were seconded for an agreed 25 month period, at the end of which they had the option to transfer definitively to the Museum or to return to the Department or the wider Civil Service. My Department has no record of any further secondments since such staff were formally transferred.

Appointments to State Boards

138. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to appoint a representative of film crews to the board of the Irish Film Board in order to ensure that a large section of workers in the sector are represented. [49526/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the Irish Film Board Acts 1980-2011, I appoint the members of the Board with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Board consists of six members and a Chair. The current Board was appointed in March 2017 following the advertisement of the board positions on the dedicated website www.stateboards.ie where applicants with a range of skillsets were invited to apply. These applications were then considered by the Public Appointment Service before a short list was presented to me.

The terms of three of the serving members of the board will expire in March 2020, in advance of which the positions will be advertised on the stateboards.ie website. It will be up to any person with the relevant skillsets to apply for positions when they arise at that time.

Film Industry Development

139. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to ensure that training in the film industry has a clear path way for trainees and recognised certification (details supplied). [49528/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for Irish film making and the Irish film, television and animation industry. Screen Training Ireland is part of the Irish Film Board and is the national training and development resource specifically created for Ireland's film and television industry. Screen Training Ireland works with national and internationally recognised industry professionals to identify, design and deliver training for Irish professionals. Training programmes are offered to enhance expertise in Film, Television, Animation and interactive screen content.

Issues around training as well as recruitment of requisite skills and talent and certification in the Irish film, television and animation industry through Screen Training Ireland are examined in the recently published National Strategy for Training and Education for the Audio-visual Industry which was commissioned by The Irish Film Board and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

The report has now been published and is available at www.irishfilmboard.ie/news/bai-and-ifb-report-calls-for-government-policy-on-training-for-the-film-tel.

The recommendations of this study, along with an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries which my Department has commissioned in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Business, Enterprise and Innovation, will provide inputs for the development of an industry-wide long term plan for Ireland as a global hub for the production of Film, TV Drama and Animation under Pillar 4 of the Creative Ireland Programme.

Speech and Language Therapy

140. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a speech and language appointment; the reason that most recent appointments have been cancelled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49491/17]

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 Waiting Lists

141. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a surgery for a person (details supplied) will be expedited to enable the person to commence primary school. [49493/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient’s general practitioner consider that the patient’s condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

142. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); if an appointment will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49494/17]

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 Card Eligibility

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49496/17]

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 Services

144. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health if his officials will facilitate a meeting with Cobh Community Hospital to discuss his plans for the hospital (detail supplied). [49502/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My office has not received a request for a meeting with the Board of Cobh Community Hospital. I would suggest that the Deputy arrange for a representative from the Board of Cobh Community Hospital to contact my office to request a meeting and I will endeavour to facilitate the Board's request.

Community Care Provision

145. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress on the development of a day care centre (details supplied) in Midleton, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49503/17]

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.

Disability Services Funding

146. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be made available to an organisation (details supplied) to develop residential services at a facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49504/17]

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

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

Medical Card Applications

147. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details sup-

plied) will receive a decision on their medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49510/17]

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.

Disability Services Data

148. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health the number of blind and visually impaired persons who have personal assistants paid for by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49511/17]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

149. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if an early appointment can be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [49522/17]

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.

Disability Services Provision

150. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the composition of the parental steering group for progressing disability services in County Kildare with a view to including parental representatives from north County Kildare in view of the fact that the group comprises representatives from mid- and south County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49525/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Legislative Programme

151. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the rationale for including a clause setting an age limit of 47 years of age for women to receive treatment in the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49527/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill aims to promote and ensure the health and safety of parents, and children born as a result of assisted human reproduction (AHR) treatment, as well as other parties who may be involved such as donors and surrogates. In this regard consideration of the welfare and best interests of children born through AHR is a key principle underpinning the Scheme. The wellbeing of women involved in AHR procedures also requires special attention, as women are the main recipients of such interventions due to their biological role in pregnancy and child-birth.

The General Scheme sets out specific criteria for the provision of AHR treatment. In addition, the Scheme states that the AHR treatment provider would have to consider the welfare of the child in making the final decision whether or not to provide AHR treatment.

Those providing AHR treatment need to make a clinical assessment of any prospective patient and ensure that AHR treatment does not represent a disproportionate risk to the health of the patient or to the health of any potential child. Female age is one of the main factors affecting the outcome of AHR and a woman's ability to conceive a child inevitably reduces with age. In light of these considerations, the General Scheme sets an upper age limit of 47 years for women for the provision of AHR treatment.

Transport Support Scheme

152. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health when legislation establishing the transport support scheme will be introduced in Dáil Éireann; the provisions to be included in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49529/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I was pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the proposed Health (Transport Support) Bill with the Joint Committee on Public Petitions on Wednesday 11th October. The Deputy may be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013. Since the closure of the Mobility Allowance, the Government has directed that the Health Service Executive should continue to pay an equivalent monthly payment of up to €208.50 per month to the people in receipt of the Mobility Allowance, on an interim basis, pending the establishment of a new Transport Support Scheme. The Health Service

Executive has advised that there are currently 4,133 individuals in receipt of this payment.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs. The Government's legislative programme for 2017 includes the Health (Transport Support) Bill. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The draft General Scheme and Heads of Bill were circulated to other government Departments and have been the subject of consultation between the Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. When the consultation with other relevant Departments has been completed, the next step will be to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance.

Specifically adapted vehicles driven by disabled persons are also exempt from payment of tolls on national toll roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular Scheme.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

153. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a mobility scooter by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49532/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

154. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a follow up assessment and treatment through CAMHS will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49533/17]

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

possible.

Orthodontic Services Provision

155. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for orthodontic work for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49538/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

156. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for student orthodontic care across all of the CHO regions, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49539/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

157. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to the recently published NTPF audit and quality assurance reports on waiting lists, the reason Beaumont Hospital did not participate in this audit as planned; if the NTPF collected information in respect of the public or private status of the patients who were adversely affected; and if so, the data on same. [49542/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The RTE Investigates programme in February highlighted the deeply moving personal stories of people waiting for treatment in public hospitals. Following the programme I was determined that the health service must learn from those patients' experiences. As a result, I asked the NTPF to examine waiting list practices in the hospitals highlighted in the programme.

The NTPF has now reported to me on its findings and I recently published the finding of the Special Audit. The NTPF's report has a number of actions to be implemented by the individual hospitals and across the public hospital system as a whole, to drive better performance in terms of how waiting lists are managed in our hospitals.

Arising from the audit, the HSE has taken immediate steps to put in place a plan at national level that will focus on driving system-wide implementation of performance and process improvement in waiting list management. As part of this plan, the HSE will assess, review and oversee implementation of performance and process improvement to address the Special Audit findings across all hospitals.

Addressing the Special Audit Report's recommendations will be a priority for the HSE for the remainder of the year and will form a core pillar of the Waiting List Action Plans for 2018 as well as the HSE's National Service Plan. In addition I have asked the NTPF to develop a plan to extend the Special Audit process in 2018 to other public acute hospitals.

The HSE and Beaumont Hospital are currently engaging with a view to having this audit completed. The Audit Report of Beaumont Hospital will be published upon its completion by the NTPF.

The audit did not collect the information in respect of the public or private status of the patients that were adversely affected.

Hospital Appointments Delays

158. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the delay in the provision of two scans for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49544/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Maternity Services

159. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the annual induction rates for first time mothers in each of the State's 19 maternity hospitals and units for each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49545/17]

160. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the concerns expressed by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2017 in regard to induction rates in Irish hospitals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49546/17]

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

Firstly, I would like to assure the Deputy that no national policy is in place which specifies a target number of births per bed in 24 hours. On the contrary, the National Maternity Strategy recognises pregnancy and birth as a normal physiological process. It recognises that all pregnant women require a certain level of support and that some will need more specialised care. As such, it proposes a woman-centred and integrated care model that encompasses all the necessary safety nets in line with patient safety principles, which delivers care at the lowest level of complexity. Equally, the model has the capacity and ability to provide specialised and complex care, quickly, as required.

In terms of induction rates, the fact is that pregnancy care in Ireland has become more complex. More challenging cases arise due to increases in obesity levels, diabetes, average age of primigravidas, assisted reproduction, multiple pregnancies etc. However, we have established a National Programme for Women & Infants Health within the HSE, to drive improvements in maternity services. In addition, the Programme will lead on the implementation of the National Maternity Strategy.

The Deputy may find the following data sources useful:

1. The Irish Maternity Indicator System (IMIS) <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/hospitals/IMISnationalreport14.pdf>;

2. The Maternity Patient Safety Statement (MPSS) <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/3/maternity/MPSS/MPSS.html>.

In particular, the 2014 & 2015 IMIS reports includes data showing the range of the rate of induction of first time mothers at hospital/unit level for those years, while the national induction rate of all mothers for the years 2008 – 2014 is available in the 2014 IMIS report. In addition, since December 2015, the Maternity Patient Safety Statements have detailed the monthly rate of induction, including of first time mothers. While I am not sure if the further information requested by the Deputy is readily available, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly with whatever information may be available.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

161. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the provision of kuvan here (details supplied). [49549/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, under 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 it may have sought, including, for example, advice from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

Sapropterin (Kuvan) was 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.

In 2016, the HSE was advised that a new health technology assessment dossier would be submitted on sapropterin. The NCPE completed its assessment of the new dossier in September 2017 and did not recommend sapropterin for reimbursement, as it was not deemed cost effective at the price sought by the company.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

162. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) [49551/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding funding or reimbursement in respect of the drugs vimizin, kuvan and brineura; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the manufacturers are amenable to making appropriate financial arrangements on a confidential basis; if these issues will be investigated with a view to making the products available at manageable cost through the HSE to the small number of persons involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49560/17]

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 medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service

164. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements which exist with home help providers; the onus placed on these providers to put in place a replacement assistant on occasions when the regular assistant is unable to report for work duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49565/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

165. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting cataract surgery at University Hospital Galway; the length of time they have been waiting; the average waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49568/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

166. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting

cataract surgery at Sligo University Hospital; the length of time they have been waiting; the average waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49569/17]

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

Health Services Provision

167. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the status of the community optometry project in County Sligo; if the project is operational; if it will be rolled out to other areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49570/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff Data

168. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of perinatal psychologists employed by the HSE; the number of consultant obstetrician-gynaecologist positions that are vacant; the locations of such vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49584/17]

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

Departmental Funding

169. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided by his Department to an organisation (details supplied) for the past six years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49585/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department administered a National Lottery Discretionary Fund up to and including 2016 from which once-off grants were paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. No National Lottery funding was provided to the organisation named by the Deputy during the past six years.

Hospital Services

170. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the enforcement measures in place with regard to the 80/20 public private split in hospitals; if it is departmental policy to allow individual hospitals to disregard this rule as long as the overall hospital group comes in around the target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49599/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A key objective of Consultant Contract 2008 is to improve access for public patients to public hospital care. Latest data from September 2017 shows that the public/private mix at a system level stands at 82% public for elective in-patient work and at almost 86% for day-case work. This is consistent with the typical 80/20 split provided for in the consultant contract.

The Contract allows consultants engage in differing levels of private practice, depending on the contract type held. Consultants holding a Type A contract are not permitted to engage in privately remunerated professional practice. Consultants holding a Type B contract may undertake private practice on-site, up to a limit of 20% of activity on a casemix-adjusted basis, and limited off-site private practice in cases where the individual consultant previously held a Category I or Category II contract under Consultant Contract 1997. Serving consultants whose public to private ratio in 2006 was greater than 20% are permitted to retain this higher ratio, subject to an overriding maximum ratio of 70:30%. Consultants holding a B* Contract or a Type C Contract may engage in off-site private practice. Their in-patient and out-patient private practice activity is also subject to maximum limits.

Arrangements concerning implementation and monitoring of Consultant Contract 2008, including the provisions in relation to private practice, are matters for the HSE in the first instance. Section 20 of the Contract provides a framework for the regulation of private practice, monitoring of the applicable ratio and steps to be taken where it is exceeded. It is incumbent on publicly-funded hospitals to ensure compliance with the terms of the contract, including the provisions in relation to private practice.

My Department has written to the HSE in recent months requesting that the HSE satisfy itself that no consultant is engaged, or will be permitted to engage, in private practice beyond the level, if any, provided for in their contract. I have asked the HSE to ensure that more robust measures are in place in 2018 to make sure consultants comply with their contractual obligations.

HSE Reports

171. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the next HSE performance report will be published. [49600/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE publish their Performance Profiles on a quarterly basis. The next Performance Profile, covering July-September, is expected to be published on the HSE website on 23 November, 2017. Management Data Reports in respect of the three months will also be published on the HSE website at the same time.

Disability Services Funding

172. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase annual funding to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49616/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Questions - Written Answers
Health Services Provision

173. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment from the HSE speech and language service and the psychology service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49617/17]

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 Consultant Contracts

174. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the audit of consultant contract compliance as reported to have commenced in May 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49641/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly on the position regarding the audit of consultant contract compliance.

A key objective of Consultant Contract 2008 is to improve access for public patients to public hospital care. The contract sets out clear rules on the level of private practice that may be undertaken by consultants, depending on the individual contract held, and the arrangements for measurement and management of the public/private mix. Consultants holding a Type A contract are not permitted to engage in privately remunerated professional practice. Consultants holding a Type B contract may undertake private practice on-site, up to a limit of 20% of activity on a casemix-adjusted basis, and limited off-site private practice in cases where the individual consultant held a Category I or Category II contract under the Consultants Contract 1997. Serving consultants whose public to private ratio in 2006 was greater than 20% are permitted to retain this higher ratio, subject to an overriding maximum ratio of 70:30%. Consultants holding a B* Contract or a Type C Contract may engage in off-site private practice. Their in-patient and out-patient private practice activity is also subject to maximum limits.

It is incumbent on publicly-funded hospitals to ensure compliance with the terms of the contract, including the provisions in relation to private practice. My Department has been working with the HSE on this matter in recent months and emphasised that the HSE satisfy itself that no consultant is engaged, or will be permitted to engage, in private practice beyond the level, if any, provided for in their contract.

Maternity Services

175. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 147 of 16 November 2017, when a reply will issue from the HSE to Parliamentary Question No. 650 of 26 July 2017 in view of the fact that a reply to Parliamentary Question No. 803 of 26 July 2017 was received on 8 August 2017. [49650/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I can advise the Deputy that I responded to her question, 850, regarding maternal deaths on 26 July 2017. At the same time I referred question 650 to the HSE for response, which was issued directly to the Deputy on 8 August 2017, a copy of which has been provided to the Deputy.

As you will be aware, since December 2015, each of the 19 Maternity Units in the country are obliged to publish a Maternity Patient Safety Statements with 17 indicators on each report. These monthly reports are published on the HSE website: www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/3/maternity/MPSS/.

With regard to annual maternity statistics, these are published in the Irish Maternity Indicator System (IMIS) National Report and can be found on the HSE website.

Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan

176. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the new hen harrier scheme will commence; the way in which landowners will be reimbursed; the way in which he will support the restoration of the value of the lands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49505/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the outset, I should stress that this is a locally-led programme, which is not directly administered by my Department. The design and management of the programme are primarily matters for the local project team, who will work closely with my Department, as this is rolled-out.

The design work for the new Hen Harrier programme has already commenced following the appointment of a locally-led Project Team earlier this year. The Project Team has now completed a series of consultation meetings with farmers in the six designated Hen Harrier Special Protected Areas (SPAs), which more than 500 farmers attended. A seminar for advisors took place in September, and comprehensive training courses are planned for January 2018 and May 2018. The scientific officers in the team have carried out Hen Harrier monitoring in all SPAs and preliminary results from this campaign will be available within weeks. Work is also progressing on detailed Terms & Conditions for the new programme.

I understand that the first expressions of interest from farmers in taking part in the new programme will be invited before the end of 2017. Unlike other schemes, the new hen-harrier programme will not be tied to calendar years and this provides for greater flexibility in both recruitment and payment. The programme will be action based, with a result based approach. Most importantly it will be farmer led and tailored to each individual SPA.

I would like to clarify that my Department has no role in the designation of lands. That function is exercised through the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The question of compensation does not arise, therefore, in the context of any schemes or measures introduced by my Department.

I have allocated a budget of €25 million for the hen harrier programme. It is worth noting that a significant framework of support for farmers with hen-harrier designated land is already in place through my Department's agri-environment scheme GLAS. Under GLAS, farmers with hen harrier habitat qualify for a payment of €370 per hectare and can earn up to €7,000 per annum through a combination of GLAS and GLAS Plus payments. The GLAS Hen Harrier action has proved hugely successful, with some 2,678 farmers now signed up. This accounts for almost 70% of all farmers with hen harrier habitat and represents a major step forward in the conservation of the bird and in securing important additional income for the farmers concerned.

Beef Exports

177. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of discussions he has had at European Union level or with the Iranian authorities regarding the possible export of beef to Iran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49507/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A bilateral agreement was concluded on a health certificate for the export of beef from Ireland to Iran in March 2013. Irish beef exports to Iran had previously been banned due to BSE. However, Ireland now has access to export fresh chilled and frozen boneless beef, derived from animals under 30 months at slaughter, although no exports have taken place as yet.

An official-led trade mission to Iran took place in April 2016; this mission was an important step in gaining sheepmeat access to Iran, which was agreed later in 2016.

Commissioner Hogan met this month with the Iranian Ministers for Agriculture, Mr Hojjati, and Minister for Health, Mr Hashemi as part of his Trade Mission there. The Iranian authorities have announced that Iran will adopt a single health certification system for exports from all EU Member States. This single certification system will be issued at first to those Member States which are currently authorized to export, such as Ireland, and will then be extended to include all EU Member States. The changes are expected to be introduced in the first half of 2018.

Climate Change Policy

178. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49550/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is actively involved with the farming sector in supporting initiatives to contribute positively to climate change mitigation including through sequestration and renewable energy.

Food Wise 2025 sets out a cohesive, strategic plan for the sustainable development of agri-food sector over the next decade. As part of the initial ground work to Food Wise 2025, a public consultation took place which involved 15 background papers and a questionnaire. These included a particular focus on climate change and sustainability.

We are committed to ensuring that the sector continues to grow sustainably so that Ireland can play its part in meeting the increasing global food demand while having regard to Ireland's climate obligations. It is independently and internationally recognised that ours is a climate and resource efficient agri-food production system and we are working with all stakeholders to find even greater efficiencies.

A number of initiatives are being undertaken to make the farming sector even more environmentally sustainable, including measures under the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which is worth almost €4 billion over 7 years. The Department's implementation of its RDP has seen significant focus on the targeting of support interventions. This Programme is aimed strongly towards environmental benefits, including knowledge transfer programmes, which will bring the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers.

The Knowledge Transfer Programme supports the roll-out of best practice on farms, while improved efficiency of the national suckler herd is being achieved through the Beef Data and Genomics scheme.

The Agri-Environment scheme GLAS has 50,000 participants. It is based on prioritised eligibility based on environmental objectives such as hedgerow and tree planting, minimum tillage and encouraging the sustainable management of upland peatlands.

In tandem there is a focus on sustainability through the ‘Origin Green’ programme. Under the Origin Green programme Ireland is a world leader in areas such as sustainable auditing and carbon foot-printing. Origin Green is a strategic priority in Food Wise 2025.

Initiatives such as the Carbon Navigator tool also assist, as does Teagasc through its advisory, research and education programmes.

The Pasture Profit Index and the Agricultural Catchments Programme help to reduce carbon emissions per unit of output produced and protect our rivers.

Furthermore the establishment and maintenance of landscape features (for example Ecological Focus Areas under CAP Pillar I) can assist with achieving other environmental objectives which are expected of land, such as water and biodiversity management, in addition to carbon sequestration benefits.

Regarding renewable energy Anaerobic Digesters (AD), to date, this has played a limited role in promoting and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions as methane emissions from the storage and management of animal slurries only compose approx. 12% of the total methane emissions arising from agriculture and the scale of Irish farms are small. Methane accounts for approximately 22% of Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions and, of this, approximately 12% of methane emissions result from the storage and management of animal manures.

It remains however an opportunity to recover methane with consequent climate change benefits. AD plants can take in waste animal products including slurry, meat products, waste food, silage etc. The gas produced in an AD plant may be used to produce electricity, through a Combined Heat and Power unit (CHP), or may be used to supply “Green Gas” (biomethane) to the gas network.

Afforestation is the main cost effective land based climate mitigation tool available to Ireland including the provision of sustainable source of wood biomass for energy purposes.

Forests have the potential to sequester and store large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, which can then be harvested as wood products, and these continue to store carbon over the long term and be employed as a sustainable source of fuel. In this way forests directly sequester carbon and substitute other materials that are associated with high levels of emissions such as steel, concrete and fossil fuels. Forests will play an important role in meeting EU emissions reductions targets during the 2021-2030 period.

Over the period 2021 to 2030, projections show that 4.5 MT of CO₂ eq may be removed annually from the atmosphere by afforestation that has occurred since 1990. Based on proposed accounting rules under the LULUCF proposal 2.2 MT of CO₂ eq is forecast to be accountable against our Effort Sharing Regulation targets from afforestation. In 2016 6,500 ha of new forests were planted in Ireland under the afforestation scheme. The overall target is to expand Ireland’s forest estate from 11% to 18% by mid-century.

Agriculture and afforestation are intrinsically linked in Ireland. Every new hectare of afforestation comes directly from agriculture.

My Department will continue to invest in and engage in initiatives aimed at sustainable farming, climate change mitigation and renewable energy.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

179. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in issuing payment under the basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied); and when payment will issue. [49552/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 11 May 2017. Processing of this application is now finalised and payment will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named in the coming days.

Pesticide Use

180. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the European Commission proposal to extend the ban on neonicotinoid pesticides to non flowering crops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49571/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2013 a partial restriction on neonicotinoid insecticides was introduced in the EU due to concerns about possible impacts on pollinators. My Department has fully implemented the Commission decision in relation to these compounds. Neonicotinoid insecticides, like all insecticides, can be harmful to bees but there is conflicting scientific evidence regarding the conditions under which they may cause harm.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is currently undertaking an assessment of the risks posed by neonicotinoids to take account of all new and relevant information that has become available since 2013. This assessment is expected to be completed by the end of February 2018. This will then form the scientific basis for a further Commission proposal expected next year.

My Department's position on any Commission proposal will be informed by the outcome of the EFSA assessment. In the interim, we are aware of a draft proposal from the EU Commission to restrict neonicotinoid use to indoor/glasshouse use, where exposure to pollinators can be directly controlled. This proposal will be examined in detail when it is presented.

Fishing Vessel Licences

181. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the response he received from fishing industry representatives regarding his plans to bring forward a new statutory instrument on penalty points at the sea fisheries liaison group meeting on 20 October 2017; the feedback from the sector to amendments he put forward; if there are additional amendments to the planned statutory instrument other than that which was put forward at the meeting on 20 October 2017; his views on whether there needs to be full buy-in for a points system from the sector and that the new regime needs to be impartial and open to appeal for all vessel owners; his plans for further consultation with fishing organisations before the statutory instrument comes before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49581/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Union (Common Fisheries Policy) (Point System) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 125 of 2016) establishes a point system, which will apply to the Licence Holder of a sea-fishing boat when

a serious infringement of the Common Fisheries Policy is detected. It is intended that the new Statutory instrument which I intend to sign shortly will replace S.I. No. 125 of 2016 to change the make-up of the Determination Panel set up under the 2016 S.I. to determine if on the balance of probabilities an infringement occurred and whether it is a serious infringement. This will involve the appointment of three independent legal professionals nominated by the Attorney General, thereby completely separating the enforcement and the determination functions. The new SI will, to the extent possible, take on board the issues of concern in relation to procedures and processes highlighted in High Court judgments on this matter. It will also address certain minor technical and drafting issues arising in S.I. No. 125 of 2016.

In relation to stakeholder consultation, I discussed with industry representatives my plans to bring forward a new SI at the Sea Fisheries Liaison Group meeting on 20 October 2017 and explained the amendments I am planning and the justification for these amendments. I can confirm to the Deputy that no further additional amendments are planned other than those outlined above and as discussed at the meeting of 20 October 2017.

In relation to feedback, the main issue raised by industry representatives at that meeting was their preference for a system of sequential application of EU points in conjunction with the prosecution process.

I advised attendees that there has been extensive examination and consideration of all the issues in relation to meeting our EU obligations to implement the points system. I indicated that the firm legal view available to me is that it is not possible to deliver on an effective and dissuasive points system, as required under EU law, by assigning points to licence holders upon successful prosecution.

I informed the meeting that Pilot Infringement proceedings by the EU Commission for non-implementation of the EU points system have been taken against Ireland. It remains an option for the EU Commission to proceed to formal infringement proceedings in respect of the licence holders system.

I also indicated at the meeting that there are also serious implications with regard to the release of funding under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Implementation of the EU Points system was an ex-ante conditionality for the approval of Ireland's European Maritime Fisheries Fund Programme, given that the programme is intended to facilitate implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy in Ireland. The EU Commission has signalled in writing that the delivery of funding under Ireland's EMFF Operational Programme is firmly linked to the implementation of the points system. This programme is investing €241m of EU/ Exchequer funding in total in the fisheries sector over the lifetime of the programme, which is crucial at a time of Brexit uncertainty. The immediate concern is with regard to the control and data collection funds. The EU Commission wrote in July 2017 advising that due to the non implementation of the Points system, EMFF funding allocated for control spend will be suspended.

In relation to the new system being impartial, it is intended in this regard that the new SI will provide for the independence of both the members of the Determination Panel and the Fisheries Adjudicator in the performance of their functions.

In relation to rights of appeal, it is intended that the new S.I. will provide for a right to appeal to an independent Fisheries Adjudicator if the licence holder is dissatisfied with the determination of the Determination Panel. The Adjudicator is a legal person appointed by the Minister.

It is also intended that under the new S.I. the licence holder may appeal on a point of law a decision of the independent Fisheries Adjudicator to the High Court. In the 2014 S.I., this ap-

peal was “final and conclusive” - this aspect of the provision has been removed.

Having an effective, proportionate and dissuasive system of points for all fishing vessels, Irish and non Irish, operating in our 200 mile zone is beneficial to maintaining the sustainability of fish stocks on which our seafood sector is dependant. This system will ensure that the vast majority of our law abiding fishermen are able to compete effectively and look forward to a sustainable future in the industry.

Severe Weather Events Response

182. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the compensation funds available to persons affected by Storm Ophelia (details supplied). [49642/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following a challenging period, the dairy sector has experienced positive trends this year in terms of raw milk and specific commodity prices, particularly for butter. I am confident that, as market demand for safe, sustainable, high quality dairy products in expanding global markets increases, the Irish dairy sector, from the farm gate to the further reaches of the supply chain, will continue to grow and prosper.

I am very aware of the impact of Storm Ophelia, particularly of course the tragic loss of life. I would like to again pay tribute to the joined-up public service response, led by the National Emergency Coordination Group, including officials from my Department.

The main impact of the storm on the dairy sector was in terms of power outages. While this caused inconvenience and expense for some individual farmers, similar issues arose for small businesses across the country. ESB teams worked tirelessly to reconnect electricity supplies. Many farmers also benefitted from back up generators shared between neighbours and at co-op level.

While compensation for power outages is not an option, this experience underlines the importance for dairy farmers to have a plan in place to access a back-up power supply in such circumstances.

Brexit Documents

183. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the names of all internal reports and research studies conducted by his Department and the agencies under his aegis since June 2016 on Brexit; the publication date of all such studies; the reports and research studies that remain incomplete; the date they are expected to be completed; if each one will be published regarding Brexit, in tabular form; and if all such reports have been published. [49643/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for Brexit, Minister Coveney has responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit. In this capacity, he is working closely with his colleagues across Government to address the many challenges resulting from Brexit. This cooperation also involves the relevant State Agencies.

Work at Cabinet level is being prepared through cross-Departmental coordination structures. These represent a frequent and active channel through which all relevant Departments

are providing their research, analysis and overall policy input to the Government's wider response to Brexit, including its priorities for the ongoing Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK.

As the outcome of the negotiations is not yet known, an important focus of the planning and preparation being undertaken through these structures is on deepening the Government's analysis and understanding of the exact consequences of a range of different possible scenarios. This represents an intensification of efforts to build on the Government's contingency planning.

My Department has conducted a range of analysis and research activities in relation to Brexit. This work is ongoing, and is primarily concerned with the implications of Brexit for agri-food trade with the UK across different sectors.

For example, both internally and in consultation with the relevant stakeholders through the Brexit Stakeholder Consultative Committee and the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, my Department has established the extent of sectoral reliance on the UK market, the potential implications of Brexit for each sector and the possible responses to the challenges presented. It has also been analysing the potential practical impact on the day-to-day functioning of trade flows, as well as potential WTO tariffs that might be applied to Ireland's agri-food exports to the UK in the event of a 'hard' Brexit.

The agencies reporting to my Department have also undertaken important research in relation to Brexit, with Teagasc publishing reports on, for example, the potential implications for the Irish agri-food sector in overall terms and on the implications for family farm incomes, and Bord Bia conducting important work through its Brexit Barometer.

In addition, my Department is in contact with the relevant agencies and with other Departments to co-ordinate further research on the implications of Brexit for the agri-food industry.

Brexit Issues

184. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the report findings by the European Parliament's AGRI committee (details supplied) that Ireland is the most negatively impacted member state in agrifood trade with the UK from Brexit, with Ireland's GDP and exports significantly impacted; the position regarding the latest Brexit discussions regarding agrifood trade on the island of Ireland. [49644/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The report referred to is a useful contribution to the research and analysis on the potential implications of Brexit for the agri-food and fisheries sectors. It confirms that Ireland will be the most severely affected of the EU27 Member States, and that the agri-food sector is the most exposed sector of the economy. This is because of its particular reliance on the UK market and the highly integrated nature of Ireland-UK agri-food trade. These findings are consistent with our own assessment.

Ireland's approach to the negotiations on the future relationship will be to ensure that the future EU-UK trading relationship will be as close to the current arrangements as possible, thereby minimising the potential impact on the Irish agri-food sector. The position of all of the parties to the negotiation is that there should be no hard border on the island of Ireland.

The phasing of the negotiation requires sufficient progress to be made on exit issues relating to the rights of citizens, the UK's financial obligations and the island of Ireland before the discussion can move to the future relationship.

Progress is being made in some areas, but further clarity will be required, including on island of Ireland issues, before the European Council can determine that sufficient progress has been made to move to the next phase.

GLAS Data

185. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 223 and 224 of 26 October 2017 if this information has been collated. [49645/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is detailed, is being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

In relation to GLAS the Department aims to pay as many farmers as possible their 2017 advance payment. This is dependent on all applicants providing the necessary material to qualify for payment. All GLAS applications must pass regulatory controls and validations as is the case with all EU co-funded schemes. Each application must pass the necessary checks, including the commonage check where applicable, before it can be approved for payment.

Information sessions for GLAS Advisors on the GLAS commonage online system were held and a video demonstrating the system is available on my Department's website. To date over 1,900 plans have been created on the CMP online system. The system remains open and available. 3,800 commonages are included in the GLAS Scheme. There are issues with a small number of cases and these are being resolved on an ongoing basis.

The main issue holding up the payment of outstanding 2016 claims, which will also hold up 2017 advance payments, is the fact that some participants have not yet submitted a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). This is a core requirement of participation in GLAS. As of November 17th there were 3,800 NMPs outstanding. All GLAS participants with outstanding NMPs have been contacted and urged to attend to this urgently so that outstanding balancing payments and future payments can issue and to ensure ongoing participation in the GLAS Scheme.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Data

186. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of sheep farmers and the number of applications to the sheep welfare scheme; the number of approved applications; the number of applications that did not meet the scheme's criteria; the number of persons who withdrew from the scheme after being approved; the number of persons who have been approved for their 85% advance payments; and the number of persons who have been issued a payment to date, by county, in tabular form. [49646/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

County	Total Number of Sheep Farmers *	Total Number of Applications	Number of Applications Withdrawn	Total Number of applications not meeting scheme criteria	Total Number of Approved Applications	Number Applicants Paid
Carlow	754	470	4	43	423	423
Cavan	958	477	7	47	423	423

County	Total Number of Sheep Farmers *	Total Number of Applications	Number of Applications Withdrawn	Total Number of applications not meeting scheme criteria	Total Number of Approved Applications	Number Applicants Paid
Clare	619	252	10	27	215	215
Cork	1,794	1072	9	61	1002	1002
Donegal	5,967	3783	39	160	3584	3584
Dubin	207	110	1	5	104	104
Galway	4,309	2573	38	133	2402	2402
Kerry	2,463	1774	13	79	1682	1682
Kildare	717	429	10	57	362	362
Kilkenny	521	330	6	33	291	291
Laois	475	283	3	28	252	252
Leitrim	1,115	732	17	29	686	686
Limerick	256	109	1	16	92	92
Longford	452	258	8	24	226	226
Louth	391	256	4	20	232	232
Mayo	4,897	3184	36	132	3016	3016
Meath	1,080	643	13	65	565	565
Monaghan	515	254	2	35	217	217
Offaly	630	332	8	35	289	289
Roscommon	1,859	1128	26	63	1039	1039
Sligo	1,603	947	14	51	882	882
Tipperary	986	527	14	58	455	455
Waterford	442	268	2	32	234	234
Westmeath	787	462	12	48	402	402
Wexford	1,155	663	11	77	575	575
Wicklow	1,361	957	9	83	865	865
Totals	36,313	22,273	317	1,441	20,515	20,515

* Data obtained from 2016 Sheep Census returns.

Please note that a variety of cases are included in the category of applications “not meeting scheme criteria”. Some of these may qualify for payment once the issue with the application has been rectified, while others are ineligible for payment.

Legislative Programme

187. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to publish the final Greyhound Industry Bill 2017 that has already progressed through the pre-legislative scrutiny. [49647/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As stated by the Deputy, the draft General Scheme of the Bill has progressed through the pre-legislative scrutiny phase. It is hoped that a memorandum will go to Government in the coming weeks, which will request approval to publish the updated General Scheme and to submit it to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for drafting.

Greyhound Industry

188. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the recommendations of the report on the greyhound industry by the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine that have been implemented to date; the recommendations of the report that have yet to be implemented; the reason for the delay in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49648/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Bord na gCon has informed me that it has systematically worked through the recommendations contained in the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine report, addressing those that it can within the current legislative framework.

I have introduced the new Greyhound Racing Bill to address certain aspects of the report and to ensure that the principles of good governance and regulation are clearly and unambiguously laid down in primary legislation.

The draft General Scheme of the Bill has progressed through the pre-legislative scrutiny phase. It is hoped that a memorandum will go to Government in the coming weeks, which will request approval to publish the updated General Scheme and to submit it to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for drafting.

Inland Fisheries

189. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress that has been made regarding the removal of a weir (details supplied). [49512/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Under the terms of a judicial review Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) on behalf of the Minister will remove the weir and the owners will pay all reasonable costs associated with the removal. IFI will act as agents of the Minister and manage the removal of the structure so as to minimise the impact on flora, fauna and habitat in the river.

My Department and IFI have been advised that the works to remove the weir require an application under the Planning Acts.

IFI staff worked closely with consultant engineers and tendered for surveys of the site to secure topographical, architectural, archaeological, geomorphological, hydrological, and appropriate assessment reports. These surveys were required to compile the necessary information for the design and planning processes. All surveys have been completed and the Planning Report is currently being reviewed by IFI and Departmental engineers.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

190. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the options Inland Fisheries Ireland has considered to assist returning salmon negotiate both a privately owned tailrace and a weir on the River Slaney at Clohamon, Bunclody, County Wexford; when Inland Fisheries Ireland will take action to alleviate passage for salmon

at these points; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49559/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I am informed by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that they have powers under Section 123 of the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959 in relation to the requirements for gratings in watercourses diverted from rivers to prevent entry therein of salmon or trout.

While the gratings in question meet the legal requirements of Section 123 of the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959, IFI is aware, however, that there exist significant issues for the free passage of fish at Clohamon. IFI is particularly anxious to improve fish passage at Clohamon but many of the issues at this location are beyond the powers and remit of IFI.

IFI has worked and will continue to explore options with stakeholders in an attempt to address the complex issues at this location.

Renewable Energy Generation

191. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason wind energy is the main source of renewable energy being explored and invested in by this Government when there are more efficient sources of renewable energy, for example, solar and tidal energy. [49638/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Current financial supports for renewable electricity projects in Ireland are provided via the Renewable Electricity Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes, which support renewable electricity generated and exported onto the national grid. Renewable technologies supported under the REFIT schemes include onshore wind, hydro, biomass landfill gas, biomass combustion, biomass combined heat and power (CHP) and anaerobic digestion CHP. At present, neither ocean energy technologies nor solar photovoltaic (Solar PV), for electricity generation, are supported under any of these REFIT schemes. This is largely down to the historic higher costs associated with both technologies relative to other commercial renewable technologies.

The 2015 Energy White Paper and the 2016 Programme for Government recognise that Ireland's long-term interests are best supported by further decreasing our dependence on foreign fossil fuels through the continued development of indigenous renewable energy. To support the delivery of this ambition, my Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030.

The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting a broad range of commercial renewable technologies, including ocean technologies (both wave and tidal) and solar PV, in addition to offshore wind, onshore wind, bioenergy technologies including biomass combustion, biomass CHP, anaerobic digestion CHP, sewage gas, BioGas and waste-to-energy.

While at this point no final decisions have been made as regards which technologies will be supported, I welcome and have noted with interest the falling costs of renewable technologies over the past year, such as offshore wind and solar PV. Increasing renewable technology diversity is one of several policy objectives the new RESS is trying to deliver and falling technology costs may lead to increased diversity of the renewable portfolio over the medium term.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 60.

Transport Policy

193. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the difference between a transport plan for a town and a traffic management plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49471/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has a wide range of roles and functions when it comes to transport planning and policy. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Coast Guard Services

194. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if mediation will be afforded by the Coast Guard in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49472/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As advised in PQ Ref. No. 35347/17 it is my understanding the matter has been handled by the Irish Coast Guard in accordance with established procedures for managing such matters with volunteers.

Rugby World Cup 2023

195. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures and steps that he took between 31 October and 15 November 2017 to help Ireland's bid to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup; and if his views on whether a stronger e-campaign of lobbying on Ireland's behalf during this period may have helped in view of the fact that delegates of the RWC committee did not take heed of the findings from the selection process evaluation report. [49473/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Before I respond to the Deputy's question, I wish to congratulate France on their win. I wish them every success as they turn their attention to delivering what I hope will be an outstanding tournament in 2023.

Wednesday's result was disappointing, particularly after the years of work put into the bid. However, in our disappointment, we should not lose sight of the fact that the technical report found that Ireland would be an excellent host country for a Rugby World Cup.

Ireland was up against two previous hosts and in the evaluation report we fell behind them based on the quality of their stadia, many of which are recently built as result of hosting Euro 2016 and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. We presented a different, more sustainable, vision that involved investment in existing stadia to meet tournament standards. Unfortunately, RWCL's (Rugby World Cup Ltd) evaluators did not agree. In any event, ultimately the voters did not support the RWCL recommendation.

There has been a concerted effort by the IRFU and Government over the last number of weeks. Diplomatic channels were used to ensure that the quality of our bid was recognised at all levels in voting countries. I myself contacted the UK Secretary of State with responsibility for sport, Karen Bradley, MP and had a detailed conference call with the Under Secretary, Minister Tracey Crouch.

Everything that was requested of the Governments was provided including guarantees and the payment of the tournament fee. The IRFU has acknowledged that they received the full support of the Governments. I do not believe that the bid team, who considered the merits of a possible digital campaign, fell short in their preparation or lobbying. In the end, it was not our day.

National Transport Authority Funding

196. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding provided by the National Transport Authority to date in 2017 to each of the seven greater Dublin area local authorities from the sustainable transport grant programme; his views on whether this funding will be fully drawn down by year end; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49476/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) programme, my Department provides funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for the implementation of sustainable transport projects including cycling and walking infrastructure; Quality Bus Corridors; road safety and accessibility schemes; and traffic management projects throughout the seven local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area.

As the NTA is responsible for the management of the funding allocations to each local authority, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rugby World Cup 2023

197. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of the €1.22 million grant aid made available to support the Rugby World Cup 2023 bid that was used; if further funding was sought; if extra funding was granted; the amount which was made available; if it was used in full; if he anticipates further costs to arise in respect of being involved in the final stages to host the Rugby World Cup; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49495/17]

208. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expenditure in relation to the Rugby World Cup bid in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49587/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 208 together.

The Department contributed €1.22m to support the bid for the RWC 2023 bid over three years. The funds were paid through Fáilte Ireland. The contributions in respect of each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 are set out below:

€200,000 - 2015

€600,000 - 2016

€420,000 - 2017

No further funding was sought by, or paid to, the IRFU or any other body.

In addition, and on behalf of the State, NewERA appointed external legal advisers to advise on a number of aspects of the bid for Rugby World Cup 2023, including the Government guarantees provided to World Rugby as stipulated as part of the bidding process. The legal fees payable have not been finalised but are expected to be in the order of €300,000 plus VAT.

No further costs to Government arose or are anticipated.

Driver Test Data

198. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting times for driving tests at each driving test centre throughout the country; the numbers on the waiting list for each area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49498/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

199. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when grant aid under the sports capital programme 2017 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49508/17]

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.

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.

National Transport Authority

200. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role in oversight his Department has in respect of the National Transport Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49536/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department published its Corporate Governance Framework in April 2016. This Framework sets out the role and responsibilities of the Department and the practices and procedures used in both internal corporate governance and in the Department's relationship with its agencies.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published the Revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies in August 2016. This Code provides a framework for the

application of best practice in corporate governance for State bodies.

Under the Code, the Department is required to establish Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreements (OPDA) with Agencies under its remit and as such, there is an OPDA in place between my Department and the National Transport Agency (NTA). The Board and Management of the NTA are accountable for the proper management of the organisation, and the OPDA makes it clear that the NTA will ensure all necessary frameworks, including those for risk management, internal audit, the Public Spending Code, the Common Appraisal Framework and the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies are fully complied with.

Good governance in the public sector encourages better informed and longer term decision-making as well as the efficient use of resources. It is clear that high standards of corporate governance in all State bodies, including the NTA, are vital to ensure a positive contribution to the State's overall economic efficiency, competitiveness, social cohesion and regional development.

Bus Services

201. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the design stage of the bus rapid transit scheme in Dublin; when the design stage will be completed; the provision under the NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 - 2035; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49537/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including the BusConnects programme.

Budget 2018 provided a four-year capital envelope for public transport of over €2.7 billion to 2021. As I have previously outlined to the Deputy, this includes a multi-annual capital envelope of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme. This significant funding will enable us to put in place the kind of bus system that is needed to cater for Ireland's future economic growth and growing transport needs, with high quality infrastructure and services, coupled with major improvements in ticketing and information, all providing a modern, faster, reliable, convenient and attractive public transport solution.

Given the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply regarding the current status of BusConnects. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Motor Insurance Costs

202. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some taxi drivers have seen their motor insurance premiums rise by 130% over the past two years; his views on the reason this is happening; the position regarding work by his Department to bring down motor insurance premiums for all drivers and particularly for taxi drivers and other professional drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49541/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The increased premium costs of motor insurance for all drivers in recent years is certainly cause for concern. It

is clear that this, particularly in the couple of years up to 2016, has also affected those working within the Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) industry. While I am informed that there some early signs that this trend is beginning to revert, with recent CSO figures showing that motor premiums generally were 14% lower in September 2017 compared with a year earlier, it is certainly concerning to hear of some very significant motor insurance premium increases, such as cited by the Deputy.

As he may be aware, the pricing of insurance products is a commercial issue for insurance companies, based on an assessment of the risks that they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

Notwithstanding this, I am keenly aware of how insurance issues are affecting the taxi industry. As the Deputy may also be aware, the Department of Finance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January of this year. Based on recommendations from this report, the Advisory Committee on SPSVs met with Insurance Ireland on 22 May to discuss cost of insurance issues relating to the taxi industry and a report on the same was issued to me on 21 June. I have forwarded that report to the aforementioned Working Group, which is already pursuing many of the recommendations arising from the meeting, including the need for further engagement to take place between the Advisory Committee on SPSVs and Insurance Ireland.

It is my hope that this cooperation and engagement will deliver better rates for all motorists, including taxi drivers.

Tourism Promotion

203. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he plans to take to assist a group (details supplied) that has been promoting the tourism potential of the towns of Roscrea and Birr since 2005 in view of the fact that its funding under the community services programme is to be withdrawn. [49562/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Funding under the Community Services Programme is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. My Department has no role regarding this programme. There is no mechanism by which similar funding could be provided to the organisation mentioned by the Deputy by either my Department or the tourism agencies.

Nonetheless, I can assure the Deputy that much work is being done by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to develop and promote tourism in the midlands region. As this is an operational matter for the boards and management of the two tourism agencies - Tourism Ireland in regard to overseas tourism marketing and Fáilte Ireland in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion - I have referred the Deputy's question to the agencies for consideration and direct reply. Please contact my private office if you have not received replies within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

204. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to develop and brand midland tourism in the same way as the Wild Atlantic Way and the Ancient

East have been developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49563/17]

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 development, implementation or management of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. Similarly, I do not have a direct role in relation to the development, implementation or management of branding strategies.

In line with the Programme for Government, Fáilte Ireland commissioned a Destination and Feasibility Study to ascertain the potential growth and best mechanism to unlock those areas that lie between the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East, which includes the Lakelands, in the final quarter of 2016. The completed study suggested a number of options to create a distinctive tourism brand for the midlands. I understand that Fáilte Ireland is currently in the process of testing brand concepts and is engaging with relevant stakeholders.

While a draft proposal has been submitted to my Department, Fáilte Ireland is currently developing a more detailed proposal for this project, which I expect to receive in December. An initial capital investment of €1m was secured in Budget 2018 to allow Fáilte Ireland to progress its work on a brand for the Midlands during 2018.

Dublin Bus Services

205. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the new schedules that have been submitted by Dublin Bus to the National Transport Authority will be approved and become operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49567/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Fáilte Ireland Expenditure

206. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of consultants hired by Fáilte Ireland in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the purpose for which each of these consultants was hired. [49579/17]

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the fees paid by Fáilte Ireland to consultants in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [49580/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 207 together.

This is an operational matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to the agency for further information and direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 197.

Rugby World Cup 2023

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to address issues arising from Ireland's failure to attract the Rugby World Cup here; if these issues will be addressed in early date to ensure that further opportunities in this regard have a better chance of success; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49618/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Before I respond to the deputy's question, I wish to congratulate France on their win. I wish them every success as they turn their attention to delivering what I hope will be an outstanding tournament in 2023.

Wednesday's result was disappointing, particularly after the years of work put into the bid. However, in our disappointment, we should not lose sight of the fact that the technical report found that Ireland would be an excellent host for a Rugby World Cup. Though we were not successful, it is important to highlight that fact.

Ireland was up against two previous hosts and in the evaluation report we fell behind them based on the quality of their stadia, many of which are recently built as result of hosting Euro 2016 and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. We presented a different, more sustainable vision, that involved investment in existing stadia to meet tournament standards. Unfortunately, RWCL's (Rugby World Cup Ltd) evaluators did not agree. In any event, ultimately the voters did not support the RWCL recommendation.

We did not win the bid due to the votes cast last Wednesday and in a competition of this nature there always will be a winner and losers. That does not take away from the excellent work that was done in preparing our bid.

The question as to whether or not the bid might have been altered is a matter in the first instance for the IRFU. This I am sure will be a matter for reflection over the coming weeks and months. For my part I responded positively to every request that was made of me to ensure that Government support was available at all times.

Rugby World Cup 2023

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the representatives of Scotland and Wales favoured France to host the Rugby World Cup; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49619/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The vote on 15th November was a secret ballot and how and why the various delegates voted is a matter for them.

The IRFU have stated that Scotland said for some time that they would be guided by whoever promised to put most money into the tournament. The IRFU also believe that Wales decided to support the Evaluation Report recommendation in order to support Mr. Gareth Davies who is on the board of Rugby World Cup Limited. However, only the Scottish and Welsh Rugby Football Unions can answer those questions.

In a competition of this nature, there will always be a winner and losers. That does not take away from the excellent work that was done in preparing our bid.

Brexit Issues

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions taken to ensure the viability and freedom to operate for the air transport sector in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49620/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit and its potential implications for Ireland are being managed on a whole-of-government basis. My Department is represented on the Economy and Trade Group and also on the Aviation and related Tourism sub-groups under these structures.

I and my officials are engaged in regular consultations with our EU counterparts and industry stakeholders in order to plan for and mitigate the risks associated with Brexit and to identify opportunities arising.

Most recently, in October, I welcomed the European Commissioner for Transport, Ms Violeta Bulc, on her visit to Dublin to undertake a range of meetings on transport and Brexit-related matters. I am currently planning on attending the Transport Council in Brussels in December. This will provide me with further opportunities to meet with my European counterparts.

The Government has been clear that its approach is aimed at minimising the impact of Brexit on our trade and economy and an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

Aviation is vital for our social and economic relations with the outside world and will be one of the priorities areas for Ireland in the phase 2 negotiations. Ireland will be ready for those negotiations when they begin and the necessary preparations and consultations are underway.

Traffic Management

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department have identified the need for alleviation of congestion of various arterial routes throughout the country, having particular regard to the M50 and the M4 from Kilcock to Dublin city with particular reference to the Maynooth to Leixlip section; the degree to which he expects major or minor investment requirements in such areas in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49621/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Tourism Industry

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects the tourism sector to develop further over the next five years having regard to the sectors already showing growth and potential such as the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49622/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Government's tourism policy, People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025, sets out targets of achieving 10 million visitors, €5 billion in revenue from overseas visitors and employment of 250,000 in the tourism sector by 2025. In 2016, there were over 9.5 million visitors, over €4.5 billion in revenue and the tourism employment figure was in the order of 225,000.

I am pleased to say that funding of almost €108m will be provided up to 2021 in the Capital Plan for Tourism Product Development. This will allow Fáilte Ireland to continue to invest in the development of tourism product, including continued capital investment in the experience brands, including the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East. It will also enable Fáilte Ireland to commence work on the development of a brand for the Lakelands region as a separate proposition to sit alongside the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East.

Transport Policy

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department continues to evaluate the transport system, road and rail, public and private, to ensure the development of efficient and effective transport in all areas of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49623/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Our objectives for the sector, as set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2016-2019, is to seek both to address the challenges that exist today and to plan for and enable future development of the land transport networks and services, with an emphasis on safety, enhancing service, facilitating and promoting more sustainable forms of transport including cycling and walking, achieving value-for-money, and promoting sound governance. The Programme for a Partnership Government also has several important commitments on land transport.

Our Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport (SIFLT), published in 2015, identified a number of implementation priorities and actions for the land transport sector. The National Transport Authority (NTA) published a Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035, which provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades that will be the subject to a number of influencing factors including funding availability. Other strategic pieces of work that either have only recently, or are expected shortly, to come to completion include: the Mid-Term review of the Capital Plan which has provided enhanced capital allocations for the coming 4-year period; the 10-year National Investment Plan to be published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform that will include Exchequer funding envelopes for the period up to 2027; the Rail Review and recent consultation by the NTA; and the Government's forthcoming new National Planning Framework which is being finalised under the leadership of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. All of these will be key enablers to ensuring the development of efficient and effective transport in all areas of the country.

In the public transport area, we have a shareholder role for the main service providers. The land transport sector also has a number of agencies: the NTA, the Commission for Railway Regulation, Road Safety Authority and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. Each has important statutory functions and responsibilities in various aspects of land transport regulation, planning, funding and delivery. We work closely with all of these service providers and agencies, providing policy and legislative leadership, aggregate funding, and governance oversight.

Rural Transport Programme

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department has continued to evaluate rural transport requirements with a view to bringing transport to persons rather than forcing the persons to converge on towns and villages as the population increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49624/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP). The RTP now operates under the 'Local Link' brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Sports Events

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which Ireland's strategy needs to change in order to become a more attractive location for international sporting events; the lessons learned arising from the Rugby World Cup bid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49625/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Before I respond to the Deputy's question, I wish to congratulate France on their win. I wish them every success as they turn their attention to delivering what I hope will be an outstanding tournament in 2023.

Wednesday's result was indeed disappointing, particularly after the years of work put into the bid. However, in our disappointment, we should not lose sight of the fact that the technical report found that Ireland would be an excellent host country for a Rugby World Cup.

My Department took the lead role in co-ordinating the input of Government Departments and public sector, as well as putting in place the legislation and guarantees required by World Rugby. I am satisfied that the Government gave the IRFU all the support that was asked of it in its drive to secure the Rugby World Cup in 2023. The question as to whether or not the bid might have been altered is a matter in the first instance for the IRFU. This I am sure will be a matter for reflection over the coming weeks and months.

More generally, the hosting of major sports events provides great opportunities to showcase Ireland and drive international visitor numbers. Accordingly, I am very supportive of the work of the tourism agencies and the national governing bodies of sport to attract international events.

For example, the Government assisted the IRFU in its bid to host the Women's Rugby World Cup which took place this year. The Government also supported the FAI in its successful bid to host four games as part of the upcoming UEFA EURO 2020 football championship. This year, with the support of Government, Ireland hosted a number of other international sports events. They include the International Taekwon-Do World Championships, European Senior Bowling Championships, Junior Touch Championships, Japan Karate Association World Championships, Youth World Coarse Fishing Championships, Grand Masters Hockey Celtic Cup, and the FIBA Under 18 Women's European Basketball Championships.

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to accommodate the various community sporting organisations throughout the country with particular reference to the need to cater specifically for active and passive sports, the young and mature; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49626/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): In relation to assistance for capital projects, the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary means of providing Government funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level.

The 2017 round of the SCP 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. 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. It should be noted that the likelihood of increasing participation is a key consideration at assessment stage.

With regard to current expenditure, Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes. This includes responsibility for the development of strategies for increasing participation in recreational sport for all age groups, and to co-ordinate the implementation of those strategies.

Sport Ireland channels funding through the relevant recognised National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Sports Partnerships. Accordingly, I have also referred the question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Tourism Industry

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the tourism sector here continues to attract sporting and activity tourism; the extent to which growth in this sector has been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49627/17]

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, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

The hosting of major sports events, both participative and spectator sports, can provide a great showcase for Ireland and drive international visitor numbers. In addition, the media coverage of sports events helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination.

It is estimated that overseas sporting and activity tourism is worth approx. €900 million to Ireland every year.

I am very supportive of the ongoing efforts of the tourism agencies and the national gov-

erning bodies of sport to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs/benefits involved in any State financial support, in particular the number of overseas visitors.

With regard to activity tourism, I am pleased to have secured additional funding for the development of Greenways in the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, bringing the total amount available for the development of Greenways in the period 2018 -2021 to almost €56m.

Tourist Accommodation

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which adequate hotel bed accommodation continues to be available in order to meet the requirements of the tourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49628/17]

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the areas throughout the country which appear to be sufficient in terms of adequate hotel and guest house bed accommodation to meet the demands of the tourism sector; his plans to address such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49629/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

Fáilte Ireland monitors the performance of tourist accommodation through regular occupancy surveys. This analysis indicates that while the country as a whole has sufficient stock of tourist accommodation, there are capacity constraints in certain areas of high tourist traffic at times of peak demand. According to Fáilte Ireland, capacity constraints in those areas of high tourist traffic outside of Dublin (such as Galway city and Cork city) are limited to the peak tourist season. In Dublin city, however, constraints occur throughout much of the year indicating that additional capacity is required.

In this context, Fáilte Ireland has commissioned periodic assessments of hotel accommodation in Dublin. Although the results confirm the current shortage, they also indicate that there should be sufficient stock in the city - whether being developed currently or being planned - to meet projected demand in the future, with the bulk of new stock due to come on-stream after 2018.

With specific regard to factors within my Department's and Fáilte Ireland's remits, revised hotel Regulations were introduced last year in response to consumer preferences and in order to boost the economic rationale for investment in hotel development. The changes set out in these Regulations should make investment even more attractive by allowing hotel operators provide more rooms and operate at a lower cost base, thereby improving hotel capacity, competitiveness and profitability. Consumers should also benefit in terms of increased room capacity, competition and range of accommodation.

Capital Expenditure Programme

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has prioritised various projects in the capital plan for road and rail expansion over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49630/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The capital investment programme in the roads sector continues to be framed by the conclusions reached in

my Department's Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport (SFILT) which highlighted the importance of the maintenance and renewal of transport infrastructure together with targeted investments to improve the existing network.

The bulk of the expenditure in the programme will, therefore, be directed towards road maintenance and renewal and meeting contractual commitments under the road PPP programme. The additional funding provided as part of the Capital Plan Review will, however, allow for significant enhancements to the programme. On national roads, the extra funding will facilitate a range of initiatives including M50 safety enhancement works, measures to reduce energy usage for traffic route lighting, the inclusion of some additional major and minor road upgrade schemes in TII's construction programme and the appraisal of a range of projects with a view to developing a pipeline of future projects. Financial provision is also being made to meet the Government's commitment to contribute to the A5 upgrade.

As regards regional and local roads the enhanced programme will allow a significant number of additional road upgrade schemes aimed at addressing safety, employment generation and support and urban regeneration to be advanced.

I have secured funding of over €400 million for investment in public transport in 2018. This increased funding will allow rollout of a number of key programmes to address congestion and emerging capacity constraints on our public transport system across our cities. This includes:

- Commencing rollout of the BusConnects programme;
- Planning and design work for new urban cycling and walking routes in our main cities. This will pave the way for an intensive construction programme commencing substantially in 2019;
- Additional Luas capacity, with additional trams and longer trams on the Luas Network;
- Maintaining the heavy rail network to protect investment already made in our national railway system;
- Progressing the City Centre Re-signalling Project to improve speeds on mainline rail and the new rail Central Traffic Control Centre.
- Continuing the programme of retro-fitting older existing public transport facilities to improve their accessibility features;
- Traffic management, bus priority and other smarter travel projects in our cities.
- Piloting of emerging low emission technologies, particularly for buses, and also measures to encourage the transition of the national taxi fleet towards alternative fuels and technologies;
- Planning and design work for new Metro North.

Budget 2018 provided a four-year capital envelope for public transport of over €2.7 billion to 2021. As I have previously outlined to the Deputy, this includes a multi-annual capital envelope of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme. This significant funding will enable us to put in place the kind of bus system that is needed to cater for Ireland's future economic growth and growing transport needs, with high quality infrastructure and services, coupled with major improvements in ticketing and information, all providing a modern, faster, reliable, convenient and attractive public transport solution.

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects regional airports to enhance and integrate with the transport sector in general; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49631/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Aviation Policy, published by my Department in 2015, acknowledges the role played by the regional airports of Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford as being important in promoting a level of international connectivity to support the tourism and business sectors in their regions.

In this regard I am pleased to inform the Deputy that as part of the Review of the Capital Plan that was carried out by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, my Department secured over €17 million in additional capital funding for the Regional Airports Programme in recognition of this role. These additional resources will come into play in the period 2019 to 2021 and are considerably in excess of the €10 million in extra Capital Plan funding that was originally mooted in the Programme for Government.

The Regional Airports Programme will continue to support necessary safety and security investments by these airports to ensure that they can continue to contribute to enhanced regional connectivity.

It is of course a matter for the airports themselves to exploit all potential opportunities to expand their air services.

Hotel Accommodation

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the international conference sector continues to be facilitated here by way of major, modern hotel accommodation; the extent to which the market is growing and has potential for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49633/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. The development and promotion of individual tourism sectors such as international conference tourism is a matter for the Boards and Management of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for the development of the business tourism sector, whereas Tourism Ireland is responsible for overseas marketing of Ireland as a destination for business tourism.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to both tourism agencies for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Tolls

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the monthly revenue from road tolls such as the M50 and regional tolls in each of the past five years to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49634/17]

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

relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

Noting the above, I am referring the question on monthly toll revenue for national toll roads to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

In relation to toll collection on the East Link Bridge (Regional Road) the question should be referred to Dublin City Council for direct response.

Rail Services

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to approve the necessary expenditure to increase the number of rail carriages serving the north County Kildare commuter routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49635/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

As the Deputy is aware, Iarnród Éireann is responsible for assessing rolling stock requirements for the heavy rail network in conjunction with the NTA.

Noting the responsibility of the agencies in this regard, I have referred the Deputy's question to both organisations for a more detailed reply. Please advise my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety Data

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of road accident black spots identified throughout the country over the past twenty years; the degree to which these areas have been identified for remedial action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49636/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Local authorities are responsible for mapping and collating available collision data on regional and local roads. Where analysis shows that engineering measures may assist in reducing the collision risk at a particular location then any local authority which is not self funding in terms of roads (under the new Local Property Tax regime) may apply to my Department for funding under the Safety Improvement works programme. Each year monies are made available to local authorities for such works with priority given to works that are considered to be most effective in reducing collisions.

Collision data for national roads is mapped and collated by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to TII for reply in relation to national

roads. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Electric Vehicles

227. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the incentives in place to encourage the sale of electric and hybrid cars and to encourage drivers to switch from petrol and diesel powered cars. [49649/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am very supportive of the transition of the car fleet away from conventional fossil fuels towards low/zero emissions technology, especially electric vehicles (EVs). The Deputy may be aware that my Department and the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment, have jointly convened an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Task Force to consider a full suite of potential measures to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies under a commitment outlined in the “Programme for a Partnership Government”.

The wide ranging work of the Taskforce has been divided between three working groups addressing: Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility; Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing; and Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership.

Working Group 1 of the LEV Taskforce, which is chaired by my Department, includes the examination of existing and potential fiscal support measures; developing business related incentives such as the accelerated capital allowance scheme and BIK scheme; as well as the consideration of other incentives including free parking and free tolls for EV drivers.

Based on the recommendations of the LEV Taskforce presented to the Minister of Finance in advance of this year’s Budgetary and Estimates Process, a suite of tax and expenditure measures have been agreed that clearly indicate the Government’s commitment to a low-carbon electric vehicle (EV) future.

I am pleased to announce that resources were secured to continue the current valuable and generous VRT reduction and SEAI purchase grants; the introduction of a new grant to support installation of home charger points for buyers of new and second-hand EVs; a new grant to stimulate take-up in the Taxi /Hackney/Limousine (SPSV) sector; a new EV toll incentive regime; a new EV Public Awareness Programme to include driver experience opportunities; public sector and commercial fleet trials allowing public bodies and business to trial EVs; a new Benefit in Kind (BIK) 0% rate to incentivise EVs without mileage conditions as well as rules to ensure that there is no BIK liability associated with recharging EVs in workplaces.

It may also interest the Deputy to know that my Department developed the National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland to support the deployment of alternative fuels for transport in Ireland and assist in removing any barriers that exist towards greater uptake of low emissions vehicles (LEVs). This plan was published in May and can be viewed on our Department’s website or by clicking on this link: www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/public-transport/english/npf-picture/6186nfpalternative-fuelsengv5.pdf.

Child and Family Agency Staff

228. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if 495 social workers have left the Child and Family Agency, Tusla since 2014; the counties in which

these social workers were formally assigned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49583/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information required by the Deputy is not readily available. My officials have requested the information from Tusla and this will be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

229. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the withdrawal of funding from the community services programme for a group (details supplied) that has been successfully promoting the heritage towns of Roscrea and Birr since 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49561/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the Community Services Programme (CSP) provides financial support to community companies that provide revenue generating services of a socially inclusive nature. The CSP works on a social-enterprise model which means that it does not fully fund contract holders but requires that they generate revenue by charging fees or raising funds. All CSP recipients are obliged to meet these criteria. These social enterprises also remain responsible for their own budgets and financial liabilities.

The organisation referred to by the Deputy received funding under the CSP for one manager and two full-time equivalent (FTE) posts. This equates to funding in the order of €70,000 per annum.

The organisation submitted their business plan in 2016, as part of the normal re-contracting process. During this process, it was found that the service did not meet the required standards in terms of strategic fit, value for money and the demonstration of the continued need for the service.

Overall, the review found that the service:

- Is primarily meeting the needs of a membership base, the majority of which are private businesses. This is not a priority for continued funding under the CSP which is focused on groups that provide services to specific disadvantaged groups, rather than private businesses;

- Has low levels of foot-fall and opening hours when compared to other tourism operations supported by the CSP. Given the service primarily benefits private business, rather than CSP target groups, the funding provided to the organisation does not represent value for money under the Programme; and

- Has not adequately and clearly articulated what the key needs of their clients are and how they propose to meet them, particularly in terms of the target groups of the CSP.

As a result of these findings, the service was recommended to exit the CSP on 30th of June 2017.

This decision was appealed to Pobal on 29th November 2016. An independent review was carried out which upheld the original decision. This was communicated to the organisation on 20th December 2016.

Discussions were held between Pobal and the organisation in January 2017, outlining options for alternative funding post programme exit in June 2017.

In February 2017 the organisation requested an extension to their contract until 30th of September 2017 to allow them to complete their summer schedule and a timely wind-up of operations. This extension was facilitated and approved by my Department and an addendum to their contract was issued on 21st of February 2017.

This organisation has now exhausted the appeals process for the CSP. For the reasons outlined above, I would now urge them to explore other sources of funding, outside of the CSP, in order to continue operating.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

230. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied); if she will sanction the school meals grant to this facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49591/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to schools and organisations at a total cost of some €47.5 million in 2017. As part of Budget 2017, the funding for the scheme was substantially increased by an additional €5.5 million which is benefitting up to 50,000 additional children from September 2017 bringing the total number of schools in the scheme to some 1,700 and the number of children supported up to 250,000.

In recent years priority for new applications for funding had been given to schools which are part of the DEIS programme, designed to give tailored support to schools who have high concentration of disadvantage. The school meals scheme provides funding for a breakfast for all children and lunch for up to 90% of children in DEIS schools. For the first time in many years, breakfasts are also now available to some schools outside DEIS that have been identified in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills which has developed a more robust and responsive framework for assessing individual schools levels of concentrated disadvantage.

While there have been expansions to the school meals scheme, any further changes to increase the funding to allow an extension to crèches would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Code

231. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1527 of 26 July 2017, the calculated value of the non-cash benefits which those in direct provision with status receive. [49468/17]

232. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1527 of 26 July 2017, if she is satisfied that a payment of €26.10 is sufficient for a person in direct provision to have the means to seek employment. [49469/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

Once a person has been granted status, they may apply for payments from my Department which are appropriate to their circumstances, on the same basis as Irish citizens. Such payments could include basic supplementary welfare allowance, jobseekers allowance or one-parent family payment and child benefit. Entitlement is assessed on the basis of the rules of the particular scheme. Apart from child benefit, payment under these schemes is subject to a means test, with the value of the non-cash benefits which they receive, i.e. accommodation, food and other services, assessed in the means assessment, in line with the legislation governing the means test for each scheme.

The Department's recommended values provided to Deciding Officers and Designated Persons for the assessment of the non-cash benefits are set out in the table. These amounts are designed to ensure a reasonable consistency between the different categories of people living in direct provision (i.e. between those who have not achieved status, who are in receipt of the Direct Provision Allowance, and those who have status and so qualify for general social welfare payments).

Regarding seeking employment, people in direct provision with the right to seek employment have access to the same suite of employment supports as Irish citizens. Once they engage with their local Intreo office and receive a jobseekers payment, they will receive assistance by way of education, training and activation supports. Prior to being directed to activation services, they will be assessed with regard to job readiness and any specific obstacles such as, for example, language difficulties are addressed at this stage.

In addition, as I previously indicated to the Deputy, Exceptional Needs Payments (ENPs) can be made to persons in the direct provision system, including to support their move from direct provision accommodation into the community. All applications are determined on a case-by-case basis having regard to the individual circumstances presented.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Table - Recommended values for non-cash benefits since 3 August 2017

Category	Recommended Value
Single Person	€169.40
Couple	€275.90
Couple, 1 child	€284.10
Couple, 2 children	€292.30
Couple, 3 children	€300.50
Single, 1 child	€177.60
Single, 2 children	€185.80
Single, 3 children	€194.00

For larger numbers of children, these values should be increased by €8.20 for each child after the third.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

233. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide direction to ensure that emergency needs payments are readily considered to support those in direct provision centres to move on in view of the fact that homeless HAP is not available in most counties and therefore there is a no possibility for those leaving direct provision to access or save the standard market requirement of a month rent in advance.

[49470/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income.

ENPs made to persons in the direct provision system are largely towards clothing costs, transport costs and the purchase of child related items such as prams/buggies. ENPs are also paid to support the move from direct provision accommodation into the community, including assistance with rent deposits and items associated with setting up home. All applications are determined on a case by case basis having regard to the individual circumstances presented. The guidance for Community Welfare Service officers who administer payments to people living in the direct provision system outlines the availability of support under the ENP scheme towards these costs. Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an ENP should contact their local Intreo Centre.

Policy in relation to the HAP scheme is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Widow's Pension Eligibility

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department recognises a foreign divorce in the case of a person (details supplied) and approves their application for widow's pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49477/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To qualify for a widow(er)'s or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension, the surviving spouse must be deemed, under Irish State Law, to be the legal widow of the deceased.

The late husband of the person concerned was previously married in Ireland and subsequently divorced in the United Kingdom. In order for a foreign divorce to be recognised in this State, one of the parties to the divorce must be domiciled in the country granting the divorce when proceedings were initiated. The legislative provisions pertaining to the recognition of divorces outside the State are set out in Section 5 of the Domicile and Recognition of Foreign Divorces Act, 1986.

Entitlement of the person concerned to widow's pension was examined. Based on the evidence available to the Deciding Officer, the deceased spouse of the applicant was previously legally married in Ireland. Both he and his spouse were domiciled in Ireland at the time their divorce proceedings were initiated in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the divorce that took place in the United Kingdom, is not recognised in this State. Consequently, the deceased's marriage to the applicant is not recognised under Irish State law.

As the deceased's marriage to the applicant is not recognised under Irish state law, the person concerned does not qualify for widow's contributory pension, and was informed in writing of this decision on 10 November 2017.

If the person concerned is not satisfied with the deciding officer's decision, they can appeal the decision to the independent Chief Appeals Officer, Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier

House, D'Olier St., Dublin 2.

Additionally, it is open to the person concerned to apply for Supplementary Welfare Allowance from their local community welfare service accessed through the nearest Intreo Centre, if the resources currently available to her are insufficient to meet her needs.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

235. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the duration of contracts to deliver JobPath that were awarded to companies (details supplied); if there is an option in the contract to extend the duration of the contract; if there is an option in the contract to terminate the contract on its expiry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49497/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. My Department has contracted two companies, Turas Nua Limited and Seetec Limited, to deliver JobPath services.

The contracts are for six years, comprising two consecutive phases: phase one entails four years of client referrals while phase two entails a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients will be referred.

The contracts include an option to extend phase one for further periods, up to a maximum of 24 months, at my Department's discretion. The contracts terminate at the end of phase two.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit

236. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will examine the anomaly whereby recipients of jobseeker's benefit are not entitled to a child dependent allowance in respect of a child over 18 years of age who is still in full-time education in view of the fact that recipients of jobseeker's allowance are entitled to receive this allowance; and her views on whether this is unfair in view of the fact that recipients of jobseeker's benefit have paid PRSI contributions to benefit from this scheme. [49506/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and who are available for and genuinely seeking full-time employment. Jobseeker's allowance is a means tested social assistance payment whereas jobseeker's benefit is a contribution based insurance scheme. The 2017 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers' schemes of €2.5 billion.

An increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) is normally payable until the child reaches 18 years of age. Where a person is in receipt of either jobseekers allowance or jobseekers benefit for at least 156 days and the child is in full-time education, an IQC will be paid up to 22 years of age or up to the end of the academic year in which he or she reaches 22. The 156 day requirement is the same for both of the jobseekers schemes.

Time spent on other social welfare payments can be combined to meet the 156 days requirement, but the period between any two payments must not be more than 26 weeks.

JobPath Programme

237. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a value for money report was produced on JobPath; her plans to conduct a value for money report regarding JobPath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49513/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is planned to carry out a full econometric review of JobPath commencing end 2017 when participant numbers will have reached a level to support such an evaluation.

The Department has recently published the JobPath Performance Data Report for the period July – March 2016, the results of which have been very positive. The report is available on the Departments website at https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath_Performance_Report_Jul15-Mar16.pdf.

The Department will publish similar performance reports for each successive quarter as jobseekers complete their 12 month engagement period.

The JobPath service is being delivered through a payment by results model. This is an important safeguard in itself, as the payment model is based on sustained employment outcomes benefiting individual Jobseekers. In addition the model has been designed so that job sustainment fees are only payable were a client of the service ceases to be entitled to claim a jobseekers related payment - during the period of employment.

Social Welfare Appeals

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the re-examination of an appeal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49521/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that in light of additional evidence submitted, the Appeals Officer has completed a review of his original decision to disallow the appeal of the person concerned. Regrettably, the Appeals Officer did not find any new facts or fresh evidence which warranted a revision of his earlier decision. A detailed letter outlining the result of the Appeals Officer's review has issued to the Deputy and has been copied to the appellant.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

239. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the parents of foster children whose attention was not drawn to the fact that they could

declare foster children as child dependants on the jobseeker's allowance payment can have this payment backdated to when they first started caring for the foster children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49582/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and who are available for and genuinely seeking full-time employment. Jobseeker's allowance is a means tested social assistance payment whereas jobseeker's benefit is a contribution based insurance scheme. The 2017 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers' schemes of €2.5 billion.

Jobseeker's payments compensate for periods of involuntary unemployment only and for this reason social welfare legislation provides that all jobseekers must satisfy certain qualifying conditions in order to be entitled to an unemployment payment.

It is open to any individual to make a claim for jobseeker's allowance including for their dependents at any time. There is a requirement under the legislation that persons must claim their entitlements within a specific period from the date their entitlement arises. This period is referred to as the 'prescribed time'. Under the legislation an applicant shall be disqualified for payment in respect of any period before the date on which a claim for jobseekers allowance is made.

Where a claim is made after the prescribed time, a statutory disqualification is incurred, and payment cannot be made for the period of disqualification. Notwithstanding this, a person may be entitled to a payment where the claimant shows "good cause" for not making the claim within the prescribed time, subject to all of the other criteria of the scheme being satisfied.

Lack of knowledge by itself is not regarded as a sufficient reason for not claiming in time. My Department publishes information leaflets as widely as possible and advertises social welfare schemes in the national press and on radio. Information Offices are available throughout the country for people to make enquiries as to their entitlements. My Department's website also provides information on entitlements for all social welfare schemes including the jobseekers allowance scheme.

Disability Allowance Payments

240. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a back payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49593/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This gentleman has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 18 November 2015.

Arrears of payment due for the period 18 November 2015 to 9 August 2016 issued to his home address by cheque on 3 November 2016 less an outstanding debt to the department. The outstanding debt relates to an overpayment of Jobseekers Allowance. My department is obliged to recoup any debt to it in an appropriate and timely manner and this includes the setting off of arrears due against the debt.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 241 withdrawn.

Wind Energy Guidelines

242. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the research that has been carried out on the effects of wind turbines on wildlife, in particular the effect of moving blades on bats and birds and the effect of tremors caused by turbines on livestock. [49637/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has not conducted any specific research on the issues referred to by the Deputy.

However, I understand that there are a number of international studies on the impact of wind turbines on wildlife. In addition, I have been informed that the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), which comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, has recently provided funding for the following independent research projects on interactions between wind farms and wildlife, including:

- Birdwatch Ireland - Phase 1 delivery of a fully consolidated bird sensitivity map for Ireland;
- University College Dublin - Study on the interactions of bats with onshore wind farms;
- BirdWatch Ireland - a project on ‘Scoping the potential requirements for delivery of a Bird Sensitivity Map for offshore renewable energies supported by deployment of innovative tracking technology on seabirds and coastal waterbirds along the east coast’.

I understand that the SEAI also provides funding to BirdWatch Ireland to participate in the international research collaboration, under the aegis of the International Energy Agency Wind Research, Design and Development Task 34: Working Together to Resolve Environmental Effects of Wind Energy (WREN).

In addition, I am informed that an independent study has been undertaken by University College Cork on the interactions between hen harriers and turbines, details of which can be found at: www.ucc.ie/en/forestecology/research/windharrier/.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

243. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the LIHAF funding will be made available in view of the fact that south County Kildare needs funding for a new bridge. [49474/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The first call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was issued to all local authorities in August 2016 and 34 projects received preliminary approval in March 2017. Three of the approved projects were in County Kildare at Maynooth, Naas and Sallins.

As part of Budget 2018, I announced an additional €50 million funding which will be available for a second LIHAF call and which will again be subject to matching funding of 25% by local authorities. This capital funding will facilitate the provision of more public 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 unsuccessful projects for consid-

eration at that time.

Water Charges

244. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied); the reason this increase has been introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49540/17]

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 (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the CRU has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers.

Any business connected to a public water supply is liable for charges as a non-domestic customer. It should be noted that the arrangements in place for all non-domestic customers on 1 January 2014 remain in place with no changes for the time being. Non-domestic water tariffs are published by Irish Water online and the charges in Monaghan are available at www.water.ie/for-business/billing-explained/charges/monaghan-county-council/. This shows that the volumetric charge for water supply services for business customers in Monaghan is €1.01 per m³.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) is progressing a review of all aspects of non-domestic water tariffs and in conjunction with Irish Water will establish an enduring non-domestic tariff framework. The CRU has published an information note informing customers and interested parties about the project and will shortly engage in a period of public consultation on the enduring tariff framework for non-domestic water and/or wastewater customers of Irish Water.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) also has a statutory responsibility to provide a complaints resolution service to Irish Water customers who have an unresolved dispute with the utility. A Customer Care Team has been setup within the CRU to deal directly with customers who have complaints. Further information about CRU's complaints procedure is available on their website at www.cer.ie/customer-care/water/complaints.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Authority Housing Funding

245. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding sought by local authorities in Counties Louth, Meath and Kildare for each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 for the purposes of constructing new local authority houses; the moneys allocated to each of these authorities in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 for the purpose of such construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49543/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The table sets out the funding provided for the construction of new local authority social housing in Counties Louth, Meath and Kildare in the years 2012-16 and to date in 2017, including

in some instances, amounts self-funded from local property tax in lieu of exchequer funding. The level of capital funding provided to local authorities for their social housing construction activity is directly linked to the scale of delivery they achieve on these projects.

Year	Louth	Meath	Kildare
2012	€6,406,989	€322,048	€990,154
2013	€997,636	€3,667,603	€110,378
2014	€171,774	€158,940	€480,338
2015	€321,189	€810,608 (including €391,000 self-funded from local property tax)	€476,730
2016	€741,690	€1,142,547 (including €222,547 self-funded from local property tax)	€1,685,683 (includ- ing €955,658 self- funded from local property tax)
2017 to date	€29,515	€3,171,936	€4,800,367

Since the publication of the Social Housing Strategy in late 2014 and Rebuilding Ireland in 2016, an increased level of approvals for the construction of new local authority social housing have been issued. This can be seen in the social housing status reports, which are now published quarterly and show details of all approved social housing construction schemes, including locations, number of new homes being constructed and information relating to their advancement.

The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of quarter 2 of 2017 and contains information on the delivery of 11,000 approved new social homes, some 1,100 of which were delivered in 2016 and up to the end of quarter 2 of 2017. A further 2,700 of these new homes are now on site and under construction, with the remainder progressing through planning, design and on to construction.

The report which is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-schemes-2017/>, includes the social housing construction schemes progressing in Counties Louth, Meath and Kildare. In the time since the publication of that report, I have approved further construction schemes to deliver around 100 additional new social homes in these areas; details of these will be included when the latest construction status report is published shortly, covering the period to quarter 3 of 2017.

The construction status report also contains details on new social housing construction projects being advanced by approved housing bodies on behalf of local authorities, the funding for which is additional to the local authority funding shown in the table.

European Council Meetings

246. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on the discussions at the EU Council meeting on PESCO. [49076/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I presume that the Deputy is referring to the FAC Defence Council which took place in Brussels on 13 November last, where Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers discussed over a working lunch, developments in the security and defence area, including PESCO.

As the Deputy is aware, PESCO is a mechanism provided for in the Treaty of the European Union to enable countries to come together and, on a project by project basis, jointly develop

military crisis management capabilities for use in support of CSDP Operations. Under the treaties, PESCO is firmly set within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and CSDP. PESCO is seen as the primary initiative in demonstrating EU ambition in advancing the agenda on CSDP. In this regard, the establishment of PESCO is seen at EU level as a political demonstration of unity, inclusivity and continuing ambition to provide global leadership, in the face of Brexit and the increased security threats in the European Neighbourhood and beyond.

There has been significant engagement by all member States in the development of PESCO to ensure that it fully respects the differing security and defence policies of the member States as reflected in the treaties and the treaty protocols including in respect of the development of the 'Notification' to participate in PESCO. The 'Notification' document recites treaty and protocol provisions, recalls the EU commitment to multilateralism with the UN at its core with a view to increasing the commitment and contributions that Member States can make towards crisis management. It also sets out the criteria for participation. Once a country has agreed to join PESCO it can decide on the projects in which it participates on a case-by-case basis.

En marge of the Council meeting and prior to the working lunch, 23 Member States signed the PESCO Notification. The five that did not sign were; the UK due to Brexit, Denmark - which has an opt out on military CSDP matters, Portugal, which I understand intends to participate but has yet to complete its decision making process and Malta which has a very small and limited defence capacity and does not therefore intend to participate at this time. A further FAC Defence, is scheduled for 11 December in Brussels and at which it is expected that PESCO will be formally launched.

Accordingly, discussions on PESCO were forward looking on the follow-up to the expected launch of PESCO in December. Discussion centred on the EU's comprehensive approach, encompassing foreign policy, trade, aid as well as security and addressed the need for PESCO projects to strengthen same and the requirement to also strengthen and reinforce civilian capabilities and crisis management tools. Regarding budgetary commitments, Ministers noted that commitments should not be seen nor presented as prejudging national parliaments' prerogatives in this area. Ministers also discussed the need for communication to the wider public.

To date Ireland has participated in all aspects of CSDP and has thus been able to influence the overall direction of CSDP, in particular ensuring ongoing support for the UN and multilateralism. Given this and the priority being given to the security and defence agenda by our partners in Europe, it will be important for Ireland to participate in PESCO so as to maintain a central influence on the development of CSDP, but also in terms of ensuring access to the latest developments on military capabilities for our Defence Forces on crisis management operations.

Participation by Ireland in PESCO will be subject to the approval of the Government and Dáil Éireann in accordance with the provisions of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2009. I am pleased to advise that the Government has approved Ireland's participation in PESCO and Dáil approval will now be sought. I am satisfied that participation will contribute to both Ireland's and the EU's enhancement of capabilities for United Nations mandated missions engaged in peace keeping, conflict prevention or the strengthening of international security in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Defence Forces Reserve

247. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will consider introducing a service medal for long service for all those from the Reserve Defence Force formerly the FCA that have in excess of 30 years continuous service done in ad-

dition to the existing 21 year service medal to date; if he will further consider it in the context of the 1916 to 2016 commemoration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49501/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): An Bonn Seirbhíse (Na hÓglaigh Cúlta) (The Service Medal (Reserve Defence Force) (formerly known as The Service Medal FCA and An Slua Múiri) was introduced in June 1961 for members and former members of the Reserve. The medal is awarded to qualifying personnel after 7 years' service. A bar is awarded after 12 years' service and a second bar is awarded after 21 years' service.

The award of this medal to qualifying personnel reflects the service given by those personnel to the Reserve Defence Force and by extension to the wider public during the periods for which they served. The Government deeply appreciates and values the contribution of members of the Reserve Defence Force and the award of this medal reflects the esteem in which its members are held. I am satisfied that this medal meets the need of marking service of personnel with the Reserve Defence Force and I have no plans to introduce additional medals in this regard.

Defence Forces Remuneration

248. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a general pay increase and-or pay restoration is planned for Army rangers; the details on this matter; if there are payments of increases and-or restoration of payments outstanding for Army rangers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49601/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in the Defence Forces are set by reference to relative levels of pay across the various parts of the public sector. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009-2015 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (the Lansdowne Road Agreement) define current pay policy for Public Servants and members of the Permanent Defence Force.

The Defence Forces have received the benefits of collective agreements in the past and it is intended that future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will continue to be dealt with within this process.

Members of the ARW have received the general increases in pay provided to all members of the Permanent Defence Force under the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement. Should the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations sign up the extension of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, they will also benefit from the increases contained therein.

The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides a formal mechanism for the PDF Representative Associations, RACO and PD-FORRA, to engage with the Official side. Having regard to commitments made under pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative bodies. Where agreement is not reached it is open to both official and representative sides to refer the matter to an Adjudicator or an Arbitration Board to settle the matter. There are a number of outstanding Adjudication findings, across the Public Service, which cannot be implemented at this time having regard to the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009-2015. This includes the adjudication on an increase in the Army Ranger Wing (ARW) allowance.

Paragraph 5.21 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, provides that the parties will commit to entering into a process to conclude by end-September 2018, which will

involve engagement in relation to an appropriate, time-bound process for addressing any outstanding adjudications, having due regard to the question of their continued validity and cost implications. The review mechanism is the subject of ongoing consideration in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.