

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 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Housing Data

13. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of expected new housing starts anticipated by the end of 2017; the number of such houses for families on local authority housing waiting lists; the extent to which he expects the lists to improve over the next 12 months; the extent to which the problem of homelessness can be dealt with within that period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52279/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The housing activity reports, which are available on my Department's website, show that 19,246 new homes were granted planning permission in the 12 months to end-June 2017, an increase of 49% over the same period last year. Commencement notices are up by 37%, with notices for 17,151 new homes nationwide submitted in the year to end- October. Moreover, there were 9,441 housing guarantee registrations (an indicator of multi-unit developments) recorded nationally in the 12 months to October 2017 (up 86% year on year). Estimates from most economic and property commentators suggest that over 18,000 new homes will be built this year, a substantial increase on the 2016 figure of around 15,000 new homes.

With particular regard to the needs of those on housing waiting lists, under Rebuilding Ireland, 50,000 social housing homes will be delivered through build, refurbishment, acquisition and leasing over the period 2016 to 2021, alongside an accelerated roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme to meet the needs of some 80,000 households.

It should be noted that there is already strong evidence that the focus on increasing and accelerating housing supply in Rebuilding Ireland is yielding results. In 2016, the housing needs of over 19,000 households were met through a range of social housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. A further €1.4 billion is being provided in 2017, to meet the housing needs of in excess of 21,000 new households, a target which I am confident will be exceeded.

I am satisfied that the delivery on the range of targets in Rebuilding Ireland provides a strong platform for meeting the needs of those individuals and families on social housing waiting lists and those experiencing homelessness.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

14. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the review of the tenant incremental purchase scheme; the changes he plans to make to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52200/17]

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

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme's operation was undertaken. The review incorporated the analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process with submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Housing Data

15. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of real social houses delivered to date in 2017 by scheme including council new build, council acquisition, council Part V, council returned void, AHB new build, AHB acquisition, AHB part V, and AHB returned void. [52163/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The 2017 target for the delivery of social housing under the categories listed in the Question is 4,450 units, including Local Authority Build, Acquisitions and Voids. Provisional data to end Q3 2017 indicates that just over 3,000 of these units had already been delivered.

When speaking in terms of "real social houses", we must acknowledge other streams of social housing provision, including long-term leasing arrangements, which will bring the target for 2017 to just over 5,000 units. In addition, the Housing Assistance Payment scheme and the Rental Accommodation schemes are delivering tangible housing solutions for thousands of people. The combined target for 2017 is to meet the housing needs of over 21,000 households through the full range of programmes and I believe that this will be comfortably exceeded. Progress on these targets is published by my Department on a quarterly basis, and also a full output report across all schemes is provided annually.

Clearly, I want to see a greater emphasis on direct building of social housing than was envisaged originally under Rebuilding Ireland. In 2018 we will see some 5,000 homes built, including 3,800 by local authorities and approved housing bodies, and a strong pipeline is in place to assist in the delivery of these homes.

The construction status report to end Quarter 3 2017 was published earlier this week and shows significant growth in the area of new build activity. Overall, we can see the progress from Q4 – 2016, when there were over 500 schemes, delivering in excess of 8,400 homes, to a situation where there are now over 770 schemes, with some 12,300 associated units. My Department will be continuing to engage proactively with local authorities and AHBs to expand further the programme of projects in the weeks and months ahead.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

16. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of HAP tenancies created to date in 2017 throughout the country; the number of HAP tenancies created to date in 2017 in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52269/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently over 30,000 households in receipt of HAP and over 20,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

An accelerated target of an additional 15,000 households to be supported by HAP was set for 2017 under Rebuilding Ireland and I can confirm that this figure has been exceeded. 16,865 additional households have been supported by HAP to date in 2017 across the country, with 522 additional households being supported in the administrative area of Wexford County Council in this period. HAP is proving successful in Wexford with an average of 11 additional households being supported by the scheme every week in 2017.

I am satisfied with how the scheme is currently operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department will continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Approved Housing Bodies

17. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the possible redesignation of approved housing bodies by EUROSTAT and the CSO; the contingency plans in place to deal with this in order to meet his social housing targets; and his further plans to assist approved housing bodies secure land in order to meet their social housing targets as per Rebuilding Ireland. [52162/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is currently undertaking a review to determine whether the Approved Housing Body sector or part of it should be included as part of the General Government sector and whether AHBs should be classified as ‘on-balance sheet’ or ‘off-balance sheet’ for Government accounting purposes, in accordance with EU rules.

Under a previous review of the sector in 2014, the CSO classified these entities as being outside of the General Government sector. However, in October 2016, Eurostat requested the CSO to review the classification of AHBs, expressing the view that the role of government financing should be given greater weight in the classification decision than had been the case at the time of the 2014 review.

While respecting the independence of the CSO and Eurostat my Department has made a number of detailed submissions and has engaged in on-going dialogue with CSO on the matter. The CSO has indicated that it is likely to conclude its review later this month and will then make its submission to Eurostat.

Until the CSO’s examination is completed, and factors underlying the position to be adopted by the CSO become clear, I will not be in a position to assess the full impact of any decision made by the CSO.

With regard to the role of Approved Housing Bodies, I am committed to seeing them continuing to play a major role in the delivery of social housing, in line with the policy and targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

Housing Policy

18. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which Rebuilding Ireland plans to address the commodification and financialisation of housing; and his view on whether the reliance on acquisitions and leasing from the private market to supply a significant share of social housing will continue this trend. [52063/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland has put in place the funding required to substantially accelerate the delivery of social housing. I recently secured a further €500m for additional capital investment in the period to 2021, which means that I have been able to increase the overall target for social housing delivery from 47,000 homes to 50,000, supported by over €6 billion in funding.

Delivery will be achieved using a blended approach, rather than by pursuing “either/or” solutions or a “one size fits all” approach. There is an increasing emphasis on housing construction programmes, and these will deliver approximately 2/3 of the 50,000 homes target. However, we are also pursuing other vehicles that provide opportunities to deliver social housing solutions that can meet the greatest number of household needs from the available resources. These include leasing and acquisition opportunities to deliver 1/3 of the 50,000 homes target as well as harnessing the capacity of the private rental market through schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment. The mix of delivery approaches being pursued also reflects the different range of social housing solutions required by different households.

As indicated earlier, there is now a greater emphasis on the building of social housing and a strong pipeline has been established to underpin delivery of these homes. The construction status report to end Quarter 3 2017 was published earlier this week and shows significant growth in the area of new build activity with over 770 schemes now in place delivering some 12,300 units.

I consider that there will always be a role for the private market in the supply of social housing. However, as our construction programmes intensify, the proportion of overall supply sourced through acquisition and leasing will reduce commensurately.

Defective Building Materials

19. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding a previous commitment (details supplied) to implement emergency measures to rehouse home owners affected by the defective blocks issue that are concerned for their own and families’ safety; his plans to address the issue of affected home owners having a mortgage when determining eligibility for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52069/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The commitment given to the homeowners referred to was in respect of the actions being taken by my Department to implement the recommendations of the report of the expert panel established to investigate the problems that have emerged in the con-

crete blockwork of certain dwellings in Donegal and Mayo. My Department, in particular, is prioritising the implementation of recommendations 1 and 2 of that report.

With regard to recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland Technical Committee, which was established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, is in the process of finalising that standardised protocol, which will be available for public consultation shortly.

With regard to recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowner/affected parties reference. It should be noted that Engineers Ireland has provided assurance that it will collaborate with my Department, the National Standards Authority of Ireland and relevant parties on measures to establish such a register.

In addition, and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

In relation to the issues raised concerning social housing, the housing regulations provide that a household that applies for long-term social housing support is not eligible for that support if the household member owns alternative accommodation that the household could reasonably be expected to use to meet its housing need, either by occupying it or by selling it, and using the proceeds to secure suitable accommodation.

However, in determining a household's need for social housing support, local authorities are required to have regard to the household's current accommodation, specifically its fitness for human habitation, having regard to the matters set out in Housing Act 1966, which includes the stability of the structure. Decisions on the eligibility of individual households for social housing support are a matter for the local authority concerned.

Local Authority Housing Provision

20. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action that will be taken to reduce the number of stages of approval that local authority housing schemes must go through within his Department. [52072/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Social housing projects funded by my Department, like all publicly funded construction projects, must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework, the objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money and financial accountability. There are nine stages under the Capital Works Management Framework, which my Department has streamlined to just four for social housing construction projects.

In order to support the accelerated delivery of social housing homes, a review of the processes and procedures in place for the approval of construction projects was undertaken in February 2017. Arising from this review, a joint working group of the County and City Management Association and my Department was established to implement its key recommendations.

The working group has agreed an overall target programme of 59 weeks for progressing typical social housing construction projects from stage 1 all the way through to getting on site. It has also produced more detailed guidelines on submissions to be made to my Department. In addition, it has revised the pilot single stage approval process for projects under €2m on

foot of feedback from local authorities with the overall aim of increasing take up. Additionally, where local authorities bring forward Design and Build Contracts, for example using the framework for rapid delivery housing projects, the approval process can be tailored to a three stage process.

The Deputy can be assured that my Department is committed to the accelerated delivery of all social housing projects and will work with all local authorities and approved housing bodies to ensure that quality and value for money projects are delivered efficiently and effectively.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

21. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria he plans to establish regarding affordability in local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, funded developments and on publicly owned land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52267/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government acknowledges the affordability pressures faced by households with low to moderate incomes, particularly in parts of the country where the demand-supply imbalance is resulting in increasing house prices and rent inflation. It is precisely for that reason that Rebuilding Ireland has prioritised the supply of new homes to meet current and pent-up demand as well as helping to moderate house prices and rents.

A range of measures has been taken to address this, for example, in relation to planning reforms to provide flexibility and certainty in delivering viable housing schemes and apartment developments in the right locations, the introduction of Rent Pressure Zones, and the establishment of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), to deliver new homes that are more viable and more affordable than would otherwise be the case.

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

As required under the LIHAF scheme's criteria and conditions, local authorities were asked, inter alia, to obtain commitments from housing providers on associated sites in relation to housing delivery timelines and cost reductions. The objective of securing cost reductions is to make the housing more affordable than would otherwise be the case and the level of the reduction is proportionate to the scale of the LIHAF investment in the enabling infrastructure for each project. In many of the projects, local authorities will aggregate LIHAF deductions to provide more affordable housing, under qualifying criteria to be set in line with the forthcoming national policy on affordability. Of course, there will also be a social housing dividend from all of the LIHAF sites, together with additional social and affordable housing to be provided on the State-owned sites.

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 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.

As regards the use of publicly owned land for the delivery of homes, it is crucial that the

State's housing land bank is developed as soon as possible. To this end, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with these lands having the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. All of the mapped sites can be viewed at the following link:

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

Two major sites in Dublin at Kilcarberry near Clondalkin and O'Devaney Gardens off Infirmary Road in the city centre, encompassing the construction of some 1,500 new homes, are already well advanced through the procurement process.

Recognising the need for more affordable housing, as an immediate additional measure, I am providing funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned lands specifically for affordable housing, using delivery models like co-operative housing which have already proven to be successful but are now needed at scale. My Department is currently finalising the arrangements for the use of this funding and I expect to announce details in this regard shortly. It is estimated that over 650 new affordable homes could be facilitated under this Scheme.

In the context of his new role in driving and co-ordinating housing delivery, my colleague Minister of State Damien English will chair the State Land Management Group which will reconvene early in the New Year to, inter alia, oversee delivery of housing from the State land bank. In this regard, my Department will also continue to engage with other Government Departments and State and semi-State bodies to pursue the long-term optimal use of appropriate sites for residential purposes.

Local Authority Housing Provision

22. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties acquired by the 31 local authorities to date in 2017; the number that are vacant at present; the average vacancy time for local authority acquisitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52272/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Through the supports made available under Rebuilding Ireland, funding is available to all local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments for social housing use, including through working with approved housing bodies.

Details on the number of properties purchased by all local authority areas, for letting to those on the social housing waiting lists, are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Information on quarter three of 2017 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly. However, current projections are that in addition to the circa. 670 new social homes delivered under the acquisitions programme during quarters one and two, a further 300 approximately have been delivered in quarter three.

The allocation of social housing supports to qualified households is a matter for the local authority concerned, in accordance with the allocation scheme it has made in accordance with Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations. My Department does not hold information on the allocation of acquired houses, but I expect that all such houses would be tenanted immediately when they are available.

Private Rented Accommodation

23. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to bring forward changes to the law on ending a tenancy or increasing rent on the grounds of refurbishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52257/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have recently announced a series of measures in relation to the rental sector, including a two-year change plan to develop and strengthen the role of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) as a pro-active regulator for the sector.

Following on from this and addressing calls from both landlords and tenants for further clarity in relation to the definition of “substantial refurbishment”, the RTB published on 23 November 2017 a comprehensive set of guidelines for landlords and tenants, and those working in the rental sector, on what constitutes substantial refurbishment or renovation for the purposes of a section 34 ground for termination of a tenancy. These guidelines also clarify the situations where a landlord can claim “substantial change” in rented properties for the purposes of exemption from the rent increase restriction of 4% per year that apply in Rent Pressure Zone areas.

The guidelines, which are designed to inform the sector and improve compliance in this area, are available on the RTB website at:

https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/Comms%20and%20Research/RTB_Guidelines_for_good_practice_on_the_substantial_change_exemption_in_Rent_Pressure_Zones.pdf

I am confident that these new RTB guidelines will provide the requisite clarity for the sector but my Department will keep under review whether there is value in placing them on a statutory footing.

Local Government Reform

24. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if plans have been drawn up or considered to reinstate certain former borough and town councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52276/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of requirements in relation to local government reform. This involves the submission of a report to Government and the Oireachtas on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy.

The Programme also references some specific issues to be considered such as the concept of directly elected mayors in cities, devolution of new powers to local authorities, reducing the size of local electoral areas, and town council status.

The issue raised in the Question will be addressed in this report which will be submitted to Government shortly.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

25. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce a pilot scheme using the cost rental model developed by an organisation (details supplied) on one or more of the sites owned by local authorities in consultation with the relevant local authority and local residents groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52067/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Reports such as the one produced by the organisation concerned are an important addition to the debate on housing in Ireland. I note that there is considerable common ground and consensus between this Report and the Government’s Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness and the Strategy for the Rental Sector.

As part of the review of Rebuilding Ireland, my Department has examined housing affordability and the optimal use of publicly owned lands for accelerating housing supply. Recognising that delivering cost rental is a key part of the solution to the affordability challenge, work is underway to identify potential local authority sites for cost rental projects, in areas of high housing demand and high accommodation costs.

In this regard, the Housing Agency and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, in conjunction with approved housing bodies, are bringing forward a pilot cost-rental project on a Land Aggregation Scheme site on the Enniskerry Road. Full details of the project will be announced in due course.

The Government remains fully committed to tackling the affordability and access gap that many low- to middle-income households are experiencing, particularly in areas of the country with the highest rents and purchase prices. I expect to announce full details of further initiatives in this regard shortly.

Housing Policy

26. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a policy of using public land to build public housing as opposed to private development on public land will be supported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52258/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government recognises the serious challenge we face in terms of housing which is why increasing and accelerating housing delivery to meet demand across the full spectrum of housing needs is at the heart of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

In terms of producing more homes, building more social housing homes on the State’s housing land bank is crucial. That is why, to help meet the needs of households in the lowest income brackets, I am prioritising the social housing build programme, with an investment of over €6bn committed under Rebuilding Ireland, to increase the overall delivery to 50,000 new social homes by 2021. Qualifying households can also avail of other housing supports such as the Housing Assistance Payments and Rental Assistance schemes and other targeted programmes.

More generally, it is crucial that the State's housing land bank is developed as soon as possible. To this end, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with these lands having the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. All of the mapped sites can be viewed at the following link:

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

Two major sites in Dublin at Kilcarberry near Clondalkin and O'Devaney Gardens off Infirmary Road in the city centre, encompassing the construction of some 1,500 new homes, are already well advanced through the procurement process. The final development model, including the tenure mix, was the subject of careful consideration by the local authorities concerned, including by their elected members. Importantly, 30% of the homes built on both these sites will be for social housing purposes, with a further 20% of the yield in O'Devaney Gardens earmarked for affordable housing.

Mixed-tenure developments are an important policy objective in Rebuilding Ireland and uphold the principle of sustainable mixed communities, where housing needs are not subject to rigid segregation based on income levels. They also provide an opportunity to see major sites developed more quickly, and integrated into existing communities and areas.

Recognising the need for more affordable housing, as an immediate additional measure, I am providing funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned lands specifically for affordable housing. It is estimated that over 650 new affordable homes could be facilitated under this Scheme.

In the context of his new role in driving and co-ordinating housing delivery, my colleague Minister of State Damian English will chair the State Land Management Group which will reconvene early in the New Year to, inter alia, oversee delivery of housing from the State land bank. In this regard, my Department will also continue to engage with other Government Departments and State and semi-State bodies to pursue the long-term optimal use of appropriate sites for residential purposes.

I expect further local authority sites to be brought forward for development, as local authorities finalise their Strategic Development and Management Plans for their housing lands, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the most potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term, including mixed-tenure projects, where appropriate.

Local Authority Housing Provision

27. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the local authority in County Wexford will only directly build three social houses in 2017; if he is satisfied with the rate of building of social housing by all 31 local authorities, if his Department will consider releasing extra funding to the local authorities specifically for the direct building of social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52271/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Addressing our housing shortage and homelessness crisis is the number one priority and Rebuilding Ireland is focused on increasing and accelerating housing delivery, across all tenures.

It should be noted that the funding for the social housing element of Rebuilding Ireland was

increased from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion in Budget 2018. €1.9 billion of this is allocated for housing in 2018. Beyond 2018, my Department has secured an extra €500 million for capital investment in social housing in the years 2019 to 2021, allowing the Rebuilding Ireland social housing target to be increased from 47,000 to 50,000 homes.

In relation to social housing construction activity, my Department publishes comprehensive status reports on a quarterly basis of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas, showing details such as their locations and a range of information relating to their advancement. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of quarter 3 of 2017. It contains information on the delivery of over 12,000 new social housing homes, which are currently approved and progressing through planning, design and construction, as well as homes delivered in 2016 and to the end of quarter 3 of 2017. The report can be accessed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/housing-construction-report-q3/>.

The report shows that Wexford County Council, and the Approved Housing Bodies it is working with, have a social housing construction programme of thirty eight projects at planning, design, tender or construction, which will deliver approximately three hundred and ninety homes when complete. In addition to the three social housing homes scheduled for completion in 2017, nine further homes are due to commence construction in Gorey later this month, while twelve homes are under construction at three sites, which are due for completion in Q2 and Q3 2018. In addition, tenders on two projects comprising twenty homes are due back shortly, while ten further homes are due to go to tender later this month.

Local authorities have also been undertaking targeted acquisitions with a particular focus on vacant properties in order to avoid increasing pressure and competition in local property markets. To date in 2017, €10.9 million has been provided to Wexford County Council to purchase seventy nine houses. A further €428,000 has been provided so far this year to the Council to return thirty four vacant social houses back into full use. To date in 2017, over five hundred households in County Wexford have had their housing need met by the Housing Assistance Payment scheme.

In addition, my Department has put in place new targeted timelines for social housing construction projects that set out the optimum timeframe from initial project concept through to design, planning, procurement and mobilisation of contractor on site. The programme puts an onus on all stakeholders to advance projects through the process in a timely manner.

My Department will continue to engage actively with all local authorities, including Wexford County Council, to deliver social housing through all available avenues, with a particular emphasis on additional construction projects.

Departmental Bodies

28. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will appoint a director for Housing First; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52068/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As the Deputy will be aware, Housing First provides direct access to housing and to the intensive health, addiction and personal supports required for people who are homeless and have complex needs. This includes rough sleepers, long-term users of emergency accommodation, young people exiting care, and those exiting institutions, such as prisons and hospitals. Evidence in

Ireland and internationally shows the Housing First approach to be an efficient and effective way to address homelessness for these target groups.

Arising from the Housing Summit last September, I indicated that a National Director of Housing First, with specialist expertise, would be appointed and that Housing First would be expanded beyond Dublin, to the other main urban areas. The newly appointed Director of Housing First will be responsible for:

- co-ordinating and driving a national, cross-Government approach to Housing First;
- supporting regional and local delivery of the Housing First programme; and
- overseeing the achievement of the Housing First targets in Rebuilding Ireland.

Over the last number of weeks, my Department has been working with the Dublin Region Homeless Executive to finalise arrangements for the recruitment of the National Director of Housing First and I expect that the position will be advertised publicly this week.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

29. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has met with Fingal County Council on the delivery of public housing. [52261/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department and I are in regular contact with all local authorities, including Fingal County Council, in order to accelerate and progress the social housing delivery programme.

In relation to social housing construction activity in general, my Department publishes comprehensive status reports on a quarterly basis, of social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas, showing details such as their locations and a range of information relating to their advancement. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of quarter 3 of 2017. It includes information on the delivery of over 12,000 new social housing homes, which are currently approved and progressing through planning, design, and construction, or have been completed in 2016 and to the end of quarter 3 of 2017. The report can be accessed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/housing-construction-report-q3/>.

In the case of Fingal County Council, the report includes details of Fingal County Council's substantial programme of over 35 projects, which are at various stages of advancement and which will yield in the region of 850 units, once completed.

While I have met each of the four Chief Executives of Dublin local authorities in my own Department's offices on a number of occasions this year, I have also met with the Chief Executive of Fingal and his senior management team in relation to accelerating housing delivery, both public and private, in the Council's offices in Swords. More recently, I had the opportunity, along with An Taoiseach, to witness first-hand the progress being made on the ground by the Council at developments such as Hansfield, Clonsilla and Wellview, Mulhuddart. I met with Council management and local representatives on that occasion, and I plan to visit further sites in the very near future.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to engage actively with all local authorities, including Fingal County Council, to deliver social housing through all available avenues, with a particular emphasis on additional construction projects.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Implementation

30. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to resolve the difficulties brought to his attention regarding the manner in which in-fill testing is being conducted by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52265/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the Pyrite Remediation Scheme. The Pyrite Resolution Board, with the support of the Housing Agency, is responsible for the implementation of the pyrite remediation scheme.

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters (including sampling and testing) pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to info@pyriteboard.ie or alternatively at oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

31. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has given direction to Dublin City Council as to which arrangements could be considered optimal in the provision of affordable housing after the finalisation of the commercial agreement for the Poolbeg SDZ. [52263/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In May 2016, the Government designated Poolbeg West as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) because of its potential to deliver a large proportion of the extra homes needed in the centre of Dublin.

The next step in realising the potential of the SDZ was the publication for consultation by Dublin City Council of a detailed planning scheme for the area. The Council prepared a draft planning scheme which was considered by their elected members in May 2017. In its role as a statutory consultee for that process, my Department highlighted the importance of the planning scheme in addressing a variety of housing needs, including social housing and those of other households seeking to accommodate themselves through private housing.

On this basis, the Council proposed a material amendment to the Planning Scheme in relation to the social/affordable, mixed-tenure housing, details of which were on display until mid-July. As a statutory consultee, my Department made further observations in this regard. The Planning Scheme was approved by Dublin City Council on 2 October.

On foot of the material amendment, 900 of the 3,500 new homes on the SDZ lands will be delivered as social/affordable units. The arrangements agreed as part of the planning scheme were outlined in response to the specific context of the SDZ and will need further development in the context of wider Government policies to enhance affordability in general. I am committed to working with the Council to deliver these social and affordable units on what is a key site for the sustainable development of Dublin City.

Of the 900 units referred to, 350 (10% of the overall total) will be delivered as social housing in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). It is intended that an agreement, with confirmed funding, will be entered into

between the City Council, the receiver and my Department, prior to commencement of development, for a further 550 new homes, the majority of which will be housing earmarked for rental in a manner that will assist in enhancing affordability, with the balance provided as social housing with a particular focus on housing for older people.

It should be noted that there is currently an appeal to An Bord Pleanála in relation to the Poolbeg SDZ planning scheme. The decision of the Board is due in February 2018.

Fire Safety Regulations

32. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that local government is sufficiently monitoring fire safety in buildings around the country to ensure they are compliant with fire safety standards and requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52166/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003, provide the primary statutory basis for fire safety in Ireland. Under Section 18(2) of the Act, the statutory responsibility for fire safety in buildings of all kinds to which the legislation applies is placed on the “person having control” of the premises.

In addition, the design and construction of buildings is regulated under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014 and the primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations, including fire safety, rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings.

Both the Fire Services and Building Control Acts provide a range of enabling powers to the local authorities, including a suite of enforcement powers.

Fire safety is achieved through the “Prevent, Protect, Respond” paradigm which is part of an overall fire risk management approach. Local authorities provide a range of services aimed at enhancing fire safety in their communities by preventing fires from happening in the first instance, and ensuring appropriate fire protection measures are in place in buildings, in addition to providing an operational response.

The fire prevention/ protection work falls into two categories known as Community Fire Safety and Technical Fire Safety. Community Fire Safety involves fire authorities working in partnership with relevant agencies and the community sector to provide safety measures such as domestic smoke alarms for those perceived as most vulnerable to fire in the home. It also includes the Primary Schools Program whereby every third class in primary school receives age-appropriate education on fire safety issues. The shift of emphasis to Community Fire Safety is seen as contributing to the overall downward trend in fire fatalities which reached a 40 year record low in 2016. In relation to the Technical fire safety work, local authority fire services review and make recommendations in relation to applications for Fire Safety Certificates under Building Control legislation. They also provide the fire safety input under various licensing systems. They undertake inspection programmes in accordance with their established priorities (such as nursing homes) and they respond to complaints about fire safety in specific premises, using the various enforcement powers as appropriate.

In April 2016, my Department published the report of the first External Validation process undertaken in relation to local authority fire services including fire safety, which was titled “Local Delivery - National Consistency”. This report is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/fire-and-emergency-management/fire-services-ireland-local-delivery-national> .

In response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June this year and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, on 27 June 2017, my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management was tasked with convening and coordinating a high-level Task Force to lead Ireland's re-appraisal of fire safety. The Task Force is reviewing existing arrangements and systems for fire safety and related issues which impact on fire safety in Ireland. As it carries out its work, the Task Force is taking into account information and developments arising in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire.

In addition to establishing the Task Force, local authorities were requested to undertake a number of initial actions and the Task Force was requested to oversee and report on a review of fire safety in both social housing and fire safety in medium to high rise buildings. This initial work has been carried out and all local authorities have reported back to my Department as requested. The Fire Safety Task Force is analysing the returns received currently and is preparing an initial report which I expect to be submitted by early January 2018.

Local Authority Housing Provision

33. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has proposals to bring forward and accelerate the construction of local authority housing. [52071/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland targets the delivery of 50,000 social homes by 2021, supported by investment of €6 billion, with almost 33,500 to be delivered via construction activity, both by local authorities and by approved housing bodies.

The target of 50,000 is an increase over the originally targeted 47,000 social homes and under the review of Rebuilding Ireland, I announced in September that the budget will be more heavily weighted to direct build activity rather than acquisitions. I also announced that Minister of State English will lead a new delivery team in the Department to work with local authorities and approved housing bodies. That team is now being established and will focus on accelerating the social housing construction programme.

My Department has also been encouraging the use of Design and Build contracts under the Rapid Build Framework, which includes modular design, set up by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). An increased uptake on this programme is now evident.

My Department has also worked with local authorities to review the processes and procedures for the approval of construction projects and has agreed an overall target programme of 59 weeks for progressing typical social housing construction projects from stage 1 all the way through to getting on site. We have also produced more detailed guidelines on submissions to be made to my Department and have revised the single-stage approval process for projects under €2m, on foot of feedback from local authorities.

The Deputy can be assured that my Department is committed to the accelerated delivery of all social housing projects and will work with all local authorities and approved housing bodies to ensure that quality and value for money projects are delivered efficiently and effectively.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

34. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when an affordable housing scheme will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52196/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government acknowledges the affordability pressures faced by households with low to moderate incomes in particular parts of the country. It is precisely for that reason that Rebuilding Ireland has prioritised the supply of new homes to meet current and pent-up demand as well as helping to moderate house prices and rents.

For households in the lowest income brackets, I am prioritising the social housing build programme, with an investment of over €6bn committed under Rebuilding Ireland, to increase the overall delivery to 50,000 new social homes by 2021. Qualifying households can also avail of other housing supports such as the Housing Assistance Payments and Rental Assistance schemes and other targeted programmes.

The Government is also committed to ensuring that there is a supply of and access to affordable homes. A range of measures have been taken to address this, for example, in relation to planning reforms to provide flexibility and certainty in delivering viable housing schemes and apartment developments in the right locations, and the provision of funding to service and open up housing lands through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), to deliver new homes that are more viable and more affordable than would otherwise be the case. Furthermore, the introduction of Rent Pressure Zones, and mixed-tenure housing projects on publicly owned land, with two major sites in Dublin, encompassing some 1,500 new homes, progressing through procurement, are also beginning to have a positive impact.

In Budget 2018, the Government removed significant obstacles to building more homes, more quickly, and at more affordable prices by:

- Investing more in direct house-building by the State;
- Removing the Capital Gains Tax incentive to hold on to residential land;
- Escalating penalties for land hoarding; and
- Providing a new, more affordable finance vehicle for builders through House Building Finance Ireland (HBFI).

Based on all relevant indicators, it is clear that the supply based measures under Rebuilding Ireland are beginning to work, with recent housing output indicators showing significant upward trends:

- Planning permissions are up 49%, with 19,246 new homes granted planning permission in the 12 months to end-June 2017;
- Commencement Notices are up by 37%, with notices for 17,151 new homes nationwide submitted in the year to end-October 2017;
- As an indicator of multi-unit developments, there were 9,441 housing guarantee registrations recorded nationally in the 12 months to October 2017 (up 86% year on year).
- ESB connections to the national grid are up 26%, at 18,197 homes in the 12 months to end-October, with 8,400 of these in the Greater Dublin Area.

Notwithstanding this, further measures are being developed, including in relation to apartment development viability. I am also considering the wider issue of housing affordability as

part of the targeted review of Rebuilding Ireland, including the deployment of the funding of €25 million announced in Budget 2018 to unlock local authority owned lands specifically for affordable housing. I expect to be making further announcements on these issues shortly.

Housing Assistance Payment Administration

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the HAP scheme in its current form; if so, the details of the analysis; if he is satisfied the HAP scheme is helping to solve the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52270/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 30,000 households being supported by the scheme. On average, 350 new households are supported by HAP each week in 2017, and the Rebuilding Ireland 2017 target of supporting 15,000 additional households with the scheme has been exceeded.

The introduction of the HAP scheme was underpinned by an economic assessment, which was submitted to Government in 2013, and informed the Government's decision to initiate the HAP scheme at that time. Although the HAP scheme was seen initially as being Exchequer neutral, external factors have impacted on this initial conclusion (in particular, the challenging state of the private rental market), and other benefits such as employment activation for HAP recipients, assistance with tax compliance of landlords for Revenue, improvement in private rental standards, better regulation of the private rental market, and reduction in local authority administration due to a central transactional shared service, should also be taken into consideration when looking at value for money.

It is important to recognise that in developing the HAP scheme, every effort has been made to provide similar levels of long-term support to other forms of social housing, while allowing for far greater flexibility of support, including a speed of access to the scheme that is as comparable to Rent Supplement. All parties to the administration of the scheme are committed to providing prospective HAP tenants with the capacity to compete for good quality, appropriate accommodation in the private market in an area they want to live in.

It should also be borne in mind that the HAP scheme was implemented on a statutory phased basis since 2014, and 2018 will be the first full year of operation in all local authority areas. The evidence of the success of the HAP scheme suggests that many households want what HAP offers them, i.e. flexible housing support with access to long-term options, at a rent that is based on their ability to pay, and the security of knowing that they can work full-time without losing their long-term housing support. HAP addresses many long standing issues raised by landlord groups and issues in relation to the operation of Rent Supplement.

As part of Budget 2017, Minister Donohoe announced that a review of day-to-day Government spending would take place in advance of Budget 2018. The 2017 Spending Review is the first in a series of rolling, selective reviews, which will cover the totality of Government spending over a three year period to 2019. As part of the Spending Review 2017, an analysis of the current expenditure on housing supports, including the HAP, was carried out by the Irish Government Evaluation and Economic Service (IGEES). A copy of this analysis can be found at the following link:

www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Current-Expenditure-on-Housing-Supports.pdf .

Rebuilding Ireland is fundamentally based on blended delivery of social housing through a range of mechanisms and achieving the best value for money within the financial resources available to Government. A range of delivery mechanisms are operating in parallel and while it is recognised that an increased emphasis is now on building units, there are a considerable number of units available nationally for leasing and renting, both long and short term, which satisfy particular demand.

I continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme committed to under Rebuilding Ireland.

Defective Building Materials

36. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he plans to prepare and publish a plan or nationwide scheme to assist home owners in the carrying out of remedial works to defective housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52278/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I acknowledge the anxiety and upset caused to owners and residents when building defect issues arise.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who have extensive powers of inspection and investigation under the Acts.

In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, that is, the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters.

In response to the many building failures that have emerged over the past decade, my Department introduced the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction by registered construction professionals and builders, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates. A certificate of compliance is jointly signed by the builder and the assigned certifier on completion of a building. This must be accompanied by plans and documentation to show how the constructed building complies with the building regulations and also the inspection plan, as implemented.

In August 2017, I published a Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings where concerns arise. The Framework is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. In addition, the Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

At the end of May 2017, the Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI) on a statutory footing and this Bill has now been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny.

Once enacted, the Bill will provide consumers who engage a registered builder with the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator. This will complement the reforms, which have already been advanced through the Building Control Amendment Regulations, and will contribute to the development of a culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

Local Authority Funding

37. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on expressions of concern by a group (details supplied) at a hearing of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on the underfunding of local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52277/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The funding system that applies to local authorities is a complex one, as authorities derive their income from a variety of sources including commercial rates, charges for goods and services and funding from central Government.

Income from local sources, such as commercial rates and goods and services, accounts for approximately 70% of the revenue (current) funding sources for local authorities. The elected members of local authorities have direct responsibility in law for adopting the annual budget, including these revenue raising measures, in addition to the annual variation decision on the Local Property Tax (LPT). As it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources. I acknowledge the very considered decisions elected members make in this context.

Central Government funding of local authorities (such as grants, subsidies and LPT allocations) similarly presents a complex picture, with transfers, both current and capital, coming from a wide range of Departments and Offices, not solely from my Department, for a variety of purposes. Some streams of funding are delivered directly from funding departments to local authorities, while others are routed through departmental agencies.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) reports on the Central Government funding of local authorities as part of his Annual Report, which provides an overview of the funds flowing from and through central government sources to local authorities and the purposes for which funds have been provided. The most recent report (for 2016) is available on the website of the C&AG at the link below:

<http://www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/annualreports/2016/Report/En/Chapter8.pdf>.

In this context, across all schemes and funding sources, my Department provided a total of €1.26bn to local authorities in 2015, €1.45bn in 2016 and €1.52bn to date in 2017. I should also point out that expenditure on housing services from my Department, much of which is channelled through local authorities, has increased markedly this year.

My Department works closely with local government stakeholders to identify the various

funding pressures on a sector wide basis. This work helps inform the decision making process to ensure that a coherent, sector-wide view of the particular funding challenges is presented. Of course, all such issues have to be considered within the parameters of the national and fiscal budgetary situation and the competing priorities presenting themselves at the wider Governmental level.

There is a finite level of funding available from Central Government for distribution to all local authorities. Nonetheless, I am satisfied that the current funding system enables all local authorities to meet an appropriate level of service provision, from the most rural and sparsely populated to the large urban centres, having regard to the democratic accountability of elected members in the local authority budgetary process.

Planning Investigations

38. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his Department's inquiry into allegations of planning corruption in County Donegal. [52161/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 12 June 2017, my Department received a report from Senior Counsel regarding his Review Into Certain Planning Matters In Respect Of County Donegal.

My Department is currently reviewing and assessing the contents of Senior Counsel's report and I have requested the advice of the Attorney General in respect of a number of points.

When I have received the Attorney's advice, my Department will finalise a submission for me and I will be in a position to consider the report in full and to take any appropriate further action.

National Planning Framework

39. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for the national planning framework; the way in which towns and regions will be selected for development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47233/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040 – Our Plan, is intended to set a new long-term strategic planning and investment context for Ireland over the next 20 years. It will outline a high-level, national vision for Ireland for 2040, and will provide the framework and principles to manage future population and economic growth over the next 20 years (catering for 1 million extra people, 600,000 extra jobs and 500,000 extra homes).

As a national level document, the National Planning Framework (NPF) will set out broad policies and proposals in relation to Ireland's major urban centres, the regions and rural areas that are essential to manage our country's strategic development over the next twenty years rather than selecting individual towns for development. Moreover, the broad policies and proposals set out under the NPF will be further articulated at regional and local levels by the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), the preparation of which has begun in each of the 3 regions (for completion by end-2018) and, ultimately, in City and County Development Plans. The Regional Assemblies were established under the Local Government Act 2014 to co-ordinate the plans, including statutory development plans, and programmes of

local authorities in the light of national policy and accordingly the new RSES's will be the vehicles through which policies and opportunities in relation to specific places will be elaborated in more detail.

Rent Pressure Zones

40. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if, a year after it was introduced in Dáil Éireann, he will review the legislative base for rent pressure zones, in particular the tight criteria for qualification which excludes many parts of the country in which rents have increased substantially in the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52065/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since October 2013, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), has produced the RTB Rent Index on a quarterly basis. The RTB Rent Index is the most accurate and authoritative rent report of its kind on the residential rented sector in Ireland. It is generated using the actual rent figures provided when registering with the RTB.

Recent legislation established rent pressure zones in certain areas and laid out the process through which further rent pressure zones can be established.

The criteria used for the designation of Rent Pressure Zones are that annual rent inflation has been 7% or above in four of the last six quarters and that the average rent in the area is above the national average rent. These criteria are used to ensure that areas where rents are both high and rising quickly are designated.

To enable the designation of rent pressure zones at a more granular level, the RTB, working with the ESRI, has developed a methodology to provide rental price information at a more local level, enabling the designation of Local Electoral Areas (LEA) as rent pressure zones as well as improving the Index more generally and providing a more detailed and useful picture of the overall performance of the rental sector. The information collected by the RTB provides a robust basis for implementing the Rent Pressure Zones and for monitoring their impact.

The coverage of the Rent Pressure Zones is substantial. Nearly 57% of all registered rental properties, involving approximately 180,000 tenancies, are currently in designated areas. There are no plans to change the designation criteria to increase the coverage. However, if other areas meet the criteria in future, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

My Department has recently conducted a review of the Rent Predictability Measure on the basis of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) rent data and of the recently conducted consultation on the operation of the Rent Pressure Zones. On 19 September as a result of the review findings, I announced a number of measures to further strengthen the effectiveness of the Rent Predictability Measure in the areas that have been designated as Rent Pressure Zones. These include making it an offence to increase rents in contravention of the legislation, providing the RTB with the powers to investigate and prosecute such cases and more closely defining the basis on which exemptions to the limits on rent increases can be claimed.

I also announced that the RTB will be given the powers and resources to take on greater regulatory responsibility in the rental sector over the next two years. As part of this change, the RTB will move towards annual registration of tenancies, which will permit the building of a national rent dataset, allowing the Board to provide benchmark rents for different property types. This enhanced data will be key to understanding trends and behaviour in the rental market as

well as informing future policy decisions.

Housing Provision

41. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress of his Department's engagement with the EUROSTAT investigation in respect of the credit union investments in social housing and lending to approved housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50875/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance and supports the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing development. The Programme further provides for consideration, with all stakeholders, as to how credit unions can support the delivery of social housing.

Credit union bodies have set out proposed means by which funding could be provided by credit unions to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the development of social housing. My Department and the Department of Finance have met with the credit union representative bodies on a number of occasions to examine how their sector can assist in the area of financing social housing delivery.

Conscious of the independence of the Central Bank in its regulatory role in respect of credit unions, bilateral engagement has taken place between my Department and the Department of Finance to consider the potential regulatory and legislative implications of credit union involvement in the social housing sector. Both Departments have also met with the Central Bank to provide information of a technical nature in relation to social housing funding arrangements. This was with a view to assisting the Central Bank in understanding how these arrangements operate, as it deals with issues arising from proposals put forward for credit union investment in social housing.

I note the publication in May 2017 by the Central Bank of the Consultation on Potential Changes for the Investment Framework for Credit Unions. The potential changes that are provided for would allow for investment by credit unions in the delivery of social housing by the larger Approved Housing Bodies, which are categorised as 'Tier 3' under the voluntary regulatory framework for the AHB sector.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by AHBs with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHBs and local authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme, which is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements, provides that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term period, typically 20 years. In return, the dwelling is made available for social housing purposes.

Changes are now being proposed to this scheme in order to facilitate larger institutional private investors to become involved in the financing of social housing. Subject to other regulatory requirements being met, this could include credit unions.

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) is acting as financial advisor to my Department in this work and has undertaken market engagement in the development of the scheme. The new arrangements arising from this process are being tested to ensure that there is no negative impact arising from how they are viewed and treated in respect of the State's General Government Balance. As part of this process, the proposed changes have been examined

by Eurostat. Work on the scheme is well advanced, with details expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness emphasises the need to look at new ways of funding social housing delivery, in particular the need to provide structural, funding and policy supports to increase delivery of social housing by Approved Housing Bodies. In that context, it provides for support to be made available to an Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)/sector-led new special purpose vehicle, involving investors which could potentially include the credit union movement.

In May 2017, my Department announced funding of €49,000 for the ICSH to support this initiative, with the aim of establishing a sector-led financial vehicle to allow AHBs to expand and to facilitate the delivery of additional housing units. Ultimately, the funding structure required to facilitate credit union involvement in the financing of social housing will have a neutral impact on General Government Debt, or be “off balance sheet” using the more commonly applied term.

The mechanisms to be used in the deployment of investment funds will have to be agreed by credit unions, with the support of their members and with the agreement of the Central Bank. My Department remains available to provide any necessary technical advice and support.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

42. Deputy Ruth Coppinger asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the opening of emergency winter beds for persons that are on street homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52260/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At last September’s Housing Summit, I emphasised the need for all housing authorities to have sufficient capacity in emergency accommodation and to have appropriate facilities in place for every person sleeping rough, on any night of the week.

I instructed the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, at that time, to set about ensuring the delivery of 200 additional permanent emergency beds by Christmas, in a range of new facilities across the city. 50 of the 200 permanent beds are now in place and the remaining 150 emergency beds will be brought into use over the coming days, with all being in place by mid-December.

As the weather becomes colder, my Department has also been working with local authorities to ensure that their Cold Weather Initiatives are in place. These arrangements ensure that additional temporary beds can be brought into use across a range of existing services and facilities for singles and couples, who need them during periods of cold weather.

In addition to the 200 new permanent beds that will be in place over the coming two weeks in Dublin, there are also more than 50 temporary beds in place, if required during the cold weather. In Cork, there are an additional 25 temporary beds in place, while in Galway an additional 34 temporary beds are in place. In Limerick, an additional 10 temporary beds are in place and in Waterford 9 additional temporary beds are also in place.

The long-term solution to the current homeless crisis is, clearly, to increase the supply of homes for those who need them. Under Rebuilding Ireland, 50,000 new social housing homes will be delivered over the period to 2021, supported by €6 billion in funding.

A key mechanism for dealing with homeless individuals is through the Housing First Pro-

gramme, which supports homeless individuals move from emergency accommodation to independent living. 180 tenancies have been established under this Programme to date.

This programme is being prioritised and it is expected that a National Director of Housing First will be appointed shortly to drive the programme. This post will be critical in supporting those who sleep rough or reside in hostel accommodation to enter into independent living arrangements.

Planning Issues

43. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the proposal to fast-track planning for data centres. [50381/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I intend to amend the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, as soon as possible in order to classify data centres above a specified threshold as strategic infrastructural developments.

This change will mean that applications for planning permission for specified data centres will be made directly to An Bord Pleanála and will not have to be submitted to the relevant local planning authority in the first instance with the possibility of a subsequent appeal to the Board.

I propose to table the necessary legislative amendments in this regard by way of Seanad Committee Stage amendments to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 which is presently at Dáil Report Stage and which it is expected will be enacted in early 2018.

Local Authority Housing

44. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the local authority housing construction programme will be made more transparent; if he will include expected completion dates with all schemes which would result in clearly identifying the schemes that will be completed in 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52192/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In publishing Social Housing Construction Status Reports, my Department is being transparent in relation to the status, at each quarter, of all approved social housing construction projects. The information provided includes details of each project, whether completed, on site, at procurement or at earlier stages of advancement.

With the funding made available in Budget 2018, the aim is to meet the housing needs of almost 25,500 households during 2018. Central to this delivery will be the construction of 3,800 new homes by local authorities and approved housing bodies, through direct build, turnkey developments, rapid delivery and regeneration programmes.

The Quarter 3, 2017 Social Housing Construction Status Report shows that at the end of September 2017, there were over 3,600 new homes on site and under construction and a further 2,000 new homes with approval to appoint contractors and move onto the construction phase. That latest status report is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/housing-construction-report-q3/>.

It will be these schemes that will form the basis for the delivery of the 3,800 homes targeted through new builds in 2018. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates and tenanting, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and approved housing bodies concerned, in the first instance. While delays can and do arise with individual projects, my Department, working with the local authorities and approved housing bodies, is ensuring that the necessary quantum of projects are in place to meet our 2018 construction delivery targets. Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies and will also form part of the delivery for 2018 and beyond.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

45. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the low number of properties being offered across the four Dublin local authority areas for the repair and leasing scheme; his plans for changes to the repair and leasing scheme to increase the supply of offers in the greater Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52193/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was initially piloted in Carlow and Waterford and the pilot has been rolled out nationally since 23 February last. The scheme is one of a suite of measures available to local authorities to bring vacant properties back into use. Since the national roll out my Department has been working intensively with local authorities and AHBs to develop and implement the scheme. There have been a number of national and local press advertising initiatives, as well as targeted online promotion, in an effort to ensure that property owners who can benefit from the scheme are aware of the benefits.

Based on progress of the scheme reported at end September 2017, applications in respect of a total of 792 houses have been received by local authorities nationwide. A total of 30 applications have been received across the four Dublin local authorities with 23 of these properties being deemed suitable for social housing, and 7 unsuitable, following an initial evaluation. An Agreement to Lease has been signed in respect of 1 property; the process of finalising additional contracts is underway and I expect further agreements will be signed shortly. Details on the number of applications under RLS in all local authority areas are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

The nature of RLS means that the period leading up to the signing of contracts – sourcing and inspecting the houses, and negotiation with the owner - is the slowest part of the process. All local authorities are active in sourcing and identifying potential properties and it is expected that significant numbers of contracts will be entered into once that process is complete. Once contracts are signed, delivery is estimated at between 2 and 6 months, a fraction of the time involved for any other capital acquisition or build project.

Feedback from local authorities indicates that in many cases properties requiring extensive repair work, and therefore not suitable for the RLS, have been secured under the Buy and Renew Scheme which facilitates local authorities or approved housing bodies to purchase vacant properties for social housing use. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the levels of vacancy recorded as part of Census 2016 have significantly reduced in the interim, particularly in urban areas like Dublin where many habitable homes and buildings have since been occupied.

As part of my on-going review of Rebuilding Ireland, I am examining all opportunities to accelerate and improve social housing delivery, as well as initiatives to bring more vacant houses back in the use at a faster pace. The operation of the RLS pilot nationally has facilitated an appraisal of the scheme as part of this review, with a view to enhancing the operation of the scheme and ensuring increased take up and delivery. This review is on-going and revised initiatives will continue to be announced as they are finalised.

Departmental Properties

46. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has included lands currently administered by the Department of Defence in his review of publicly owned land that could be utilised for housing; and if he has had discussions with the Minister for Defence in relation to the long term optimal use of these sites. [52262/17]

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

On 27 April 2017, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. This mapped list includes a Department of Defence site in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. All of the mapped sites can be viewed at the following link:

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

In the context of his new role in driving and co-ordinating housing delivery, my colleague Minister of State Damien English will chair the State Land Management Group which will reconvene early in the New Year to, inter alia, oversee delivery of housing from the State land bank. In this regard, my Department will continue to engage with other Government Departments and State and semi-State bodies to pursue the long-term optimal use of appropriate sites for residential purposes.

Local Authority Housing Data

47. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1358 of 7 November 2017, if he will reconcile the data on voids contained therein and in the 2016 NOAC report; and if an assurance will be provided that there is no double counting of regular voids and long term voids in his annual social housing output figures for 2014 to 2017. [52165/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The 2016 NOAC report published in November 2016 refers to Performance Indicators in Local Authorities 2015. The figures in the report, indicating the percentage of local authority housing stock not tenanted at end 2015, are based on the number of vacant units at the end of 2015, regardless of the reason for non-occupation or the length of time the dwelling has been unoc-

cupied.

My Department's figure refers, however, to the number of units that were funded under the voids programme in a four year period. While it is likely that some of the units vacant at 31 December 2015 may have been the subject of voids programme funding in 2016 or 2017, there is no direct relationship between the two figures. The voids programme is focused on addressing vacant housing stock in need of far greater levels of repair than normal re-letting works, to bring them up to a suitable letting condition.

Defective Building Materials

48. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to a commitment given by an Taoiseach on 21 November 2017 that the report on defective blocks will be discussed at Cabinet before Christmas 2017, the position regarding the nature of the report he plans to bring to Cabinet before Christmas; if he will bring specific proposals to Cabinet; if the Cabinet will be discussing and asked to agree on the principal of establishing a redress scheme; the date on which he will present the report to Cabinet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52070/17]

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

The panel had the following terms of reference:

- (i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;
- (ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;
- (iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and
- (iv) To submit a report within six months.

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

My Department is prioritising the implementation of recommendations 1 and 2.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) Technical Committee, established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, held its inaugural meeting on 11 September 2017 and has held several further meetings since. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. My Department understands from the NSAI that the Technical Committee is in the process of finalising the standardised protocol, which will be available for public consultation shortly.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowners/af-

affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland have provided assurance that they will collaborate with the Department, the NSAI and others on measures to establish such a register.

During July this year, I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties.

In addition, and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties. Once completed, any issues requiring Cabinet approval will be brought to Government.

Shared Ownership Scheme

49. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the findings of the 2013 departmental review into shared ownership schemes; the reason the report was never published; the actions he took following the report; and the advice that is being given to councils dealing with distressed shared ownership mortgages. [52164/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2011, the Government announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme. From 1991 to 2010, a total of 16,492 loans were issued under the scheme, of which 3,585 remained at the end of Q1 2017.

A review of the shared ownership scheme was undertaken in 2013. The review was not intended for publication and was a report for internal use only.

Following the review, my Department together with the Housing Agency, the Housing Finance Agency and local authorities, considered the affordability issues facing some borrowers, who purchased properties under the shared ownership schemes and devised a more affordable long-term path towards full home ownership. Indeed, a range of measures have already been undertaken to reduce the monthly payments of shared ownership borrowers.

The index linked shared ownership scheme, which operated from 1999 until 2002, has been revised with regard to the annual indexation of the rental equity balance and rental payments. The amendments, which came into effect on 1 July 2015, reduce the monthly cost for these borrowers and avoid rental equity balances increasing for the remaining term. My Department has issued directions to local authorities outlining the measures and I understand that these changes are being applied to individual loan accounts.

In addition, the variable mortgage interest rate charged to local authority borrowers was reduced to 2.3% with effect from 1 July 2016, which has helped many shared ownership borrowers.

An innovative shared ownership restructuring option has been available to shared ownership borrowers since 1 April 2016, and involves rolling-up all outstanding debt under a share ownership arrangement into a single annuity loan. The term of the annuity loan will be determined by the amount of the monthly repayment deemed to be affordable and sustainable for each shared ownership borrower. This restructuring option allows the borrower to have a regularised, restructured repayment solution, which is more easily understood. This arrangement may be of particular benefit to those shared ownership borrowers who are nearing the end of their annuity term but who have not made sufficient provision for the repayment of their rental equity balance. The feasibility of this new option for each shared ownership borrower will

be determined by their local authority, and may not be appropriate in all cases. For example, in some instances, continuing with the current shared ownership arrangement may be the best option for both the shared ownership borrower and the local authority, or in other cases where the outstanding debt may not be sustainable for the borrower in the long-term, the Local Authority Mortgage to Rent (LAMTR) option might ultimately be the appropriate solution.

There is no obligation on any shared ownership borrower to restructure their loan arrangement and local authorities in implementing the restructuring option will direct shared ownership borrowers to seek financial and legal advice prior to accepting any offer of a restructuring option. The new Abhaile Service, accessed via MABS, can assist shared ownership borrowers who are in arrears to access free independent expert financial and legal advice. Full details of the supports offered by the Abhaile Service are available from <https://www.mabs.ie/en/abhaile/>.

Under the restructuring option, where shared ownership borrowers require financial and legal advice outside of that provided via MABS, local authorities will arrange to pay the cost of these fees to a maximum of €1,000, excluding VAT. Detailed guidance, training and direction have been provided by my Department and the Housing Agency to local authorities regarding the implementation of the measure and my Department is continuing to monitor the impact of the new measure for borrowers.

Details on the measures available to borrowers with shared ownership arrangements are available from their local authority. Overall, local authority borrowers are encouraged to engage with their local authority at the earliest opportunity if they are having difficulties making the repayments on their shared ownership arrangement. Information in relation to the local authority mortgage arrears resolution process (MARP) and the help available to borrowers is also available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/home-ownership/mortgage-arrears/guidance-mortgage-arrears>.

Housing Provision

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which he expects to be in a position to meet the most urgent and pressing housing needs in the shortest possible time with particular reference to addressing the housing crisis; his views on whether he needs to invoke emergency legislation to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52280/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Recognising the serious challenge we face in terms of housing, the Government has prioritised the development and implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland is a €6 billion, multi-annual, broadly based action plan which seeks to increase the overall supply of new homes to 25,000 per annum by 2020; deliver an additional 50,000 social housing units in the period to 2021; and meet the housing needs of some 87,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Strong progress on implementation is already being made. On the social housing construction front, we have a programme of works on 770 sites that will deliver over 12,300 new homes, with the number of schemes in the programme growing on a weekly basis. Clearly, we want to see a greater emphasis on direct building of social housing than was envisaged originally under Rebuilding Ireland. In this regard, we will see almost 5,000 new social homes built in 2018, including 3,800 by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

In addition to the established local authority and AHB direct-build programme, activity continues apace across a range of other measures, including for example, acquisitions by local authorities and AHBs, the Housing Assistance Payment scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme, which are delivering tangible housing solutions for thousands of households. The target for 2017 is for the needs of over 21,000 households to be met through the full range of social housing programmes and I believe that this will be comfortably exceeded. Progress on delivery is published by my Department on a quarterly basis and a full output report across all schemes is provided on an annual basis.

Beyond social housing, all relevant indicators – including planning permissions, construction commencement notices and connections to the ESB grid - are showing very significant upward trends in home-building activity.

I am satisfied the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, together with initiatives announced on foot of the targeted review of progress which was undertaken over recent months, as well as additional measures announced under Budget 2018, provide a robust framework for addressing the housing and homelessness challenges we face. My focus and that of all delivery agents will remain firmly on implementation and delivery to ensure that the range of objectives and targets set are achieved.

Vacant Properties

51. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to take vacant properties into public ownership in view of the worsening homeless emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52268/17]

52. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will introduce measures to deal with the numbers of vacant homes here; when he will have accurate figures for same; and if extra funding will be made available for local authorities and approved housing bodies to acquire or compulsory purchase such units. [52275/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 52 together.

With regard to data on vacant homes (excluding holiday homes), Census 2016 indicates that there were 183,312 dwellings identified as vacant on the Census night of 24 April 2016. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the levels of vacancy recorded as part of Census 2016 have significantly reduced in the interim, particularly in urban areas where many habitable homes and buildings have since been occupied.

With a view to addressing the vacancy situation, I asked all local authorities to draw up Vacant Homes Action Plans for their areas, to designate Vacant Homes Officers to co-ordinate actions on addressing vacancy, to examine Census 2016 and other more up-to-date data on vacant homes for the purpose of deriving the up to date position on vacancy in their areas, particularly in priority vacancy hotspot areas where housing demand is most acute, to engage with owners to bring empty homes back into use, and to set ambitious but realistic targets for the vacant dwellings that can be brought back into use whether for sale or rent or for social housing purposes.

In this context, I asked that the Vacant Homes Action Plans for all local authorities in the Dublin area and the other four main cities (Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) be devised as urgently as possible with a deadline for other County Action Plans to be completed by end January 2018.

Complementary to this, my Department has introduced a number of significant measures under pillar 5 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan to incentivise the increased use of vacant housing stock. These initiatives include the

- Repair and Leasing Scheme (with funding of €140m in the period to 2021),
- Buy and Renew Scheme (with initial funding in the years 2017 and 2018 of up to €75m), and
- Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund (revolving fund of €70m operated by the Housing Agency for the purchase of vacant buy-to-let properties on the portfolios of financial institutions for social housing use).

In terms of funding to acquire properties, supports have been made available under Rebuilding Ireland to all local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments for social housing use, including through working with approved housing bodies.

As part of their acquisition and development of social housing, local authorities have full scope to acquire and remediate vacant homes, alongside acquiring standard second hand homes and constructing new homes. The number of vacant homes to be acquired and remediated is a matter for local authorities to consider, in the first instance, in the context of their overall social housing delivery programmes.

I will continue to monitor opportunities for further measures to assist in addressing vacancy, including taking vacant properties into public ownership where feasible.

Good Friday Agreement

53. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether legislation being enacted or proposed by the British Government will not impact on aspects of the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52502/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is determined to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts is fully protected and respected in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and this has been a headline priority since the UK referendum result. As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government has a solemn responsibility to protect the Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the Peace Process which have been of immeasurable benefit to the entire island, north and south. The British Government has likewise confirmed its commitment to upholding the Good Friday Agreement, including in Prime Minister May's Article 50 notification to the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in March, and in more recent pronouncements. The British Government has proposed a number of pieces of draft legislation relating to the UK's Withdrawal from the European Union, which are being considered at Westminster. My Department, including through the Embassy in London, is actively following the progress of these bills in the UK parliament, as is usually done with all draft legislation of interest for Ireland.

Tax Code

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if tax liabilities accruing

from the renting out of a family home in the case of a person (details supplied) can be offset against the rent paid for an alternative family home during the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52338/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is no legislative basis on which the offset proposed by the Deputy could be allowed. The Deputy will be aware that landlords are liable to tax on their net rental profit after deduction of allowable letting expenses, and not on the gross rental income received. As regards properties that are rented, currently a landlord may be allowed a deduction of 80% of the interest paid on borrowed money used to purchase, improve or repair rented premises when calculating rental income. From 1 January 2018, this will increase to 85% and there will be further annual incremental increases of 5% until full 100% deductibility is restored from 2021. These increases were provided for in last year's Finance Bill.

There are also a number of other allowances and deductions available to reduce the tax on rental income paid. These include, for example, the cost to the landlord of any goods provided or services rendered to a tenant and the cost of maintenance, repairs, insurance and management of the property. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners has published information on its website on the income tax treatment of rental income. It sets out the amount of rental income to be taken into account for income tax purposes and provides a comprehensive list of expenditure items that are allowable for deduction in computing rental income for tax purposes. This information is available at:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/property/rental-income/irish-rental-income/index.aspx>.

The Deputy may also be aware that in Finance Act 2015, a new relief was introduced which allows a full 100% mortgage interest deduction where a landlord undertakes, for a period of at least three years, to provide accommodation to tenants in receipt of social housing supports and registers such undertakings with the Private Residential Tenancies Board within certain time limits. Further information on this relief is available in section 97 of the Revenue Commissioners – Notes for Guidance – Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 – Finance Act 2016 Edition – Part 4 Principal Provisions Relating to the Schedule D charge, which is available at:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/documents/notes-for-guidance/tca/part04.pdf>.

The taxation of all rental property in the State is dealt with under the same legislation, and an attempt to carve out a cohort of landlords as described by the Deputy would prove problematic. There are many reasons why individuals might choose, or feel obliged, to rent a property while putting their own mortgaged property out to rent, such as relocation for work purposes or changed family circumstances, and all are treated equally by the tax system. The provision of additional tax deductions to one sub-set of landlords could create difficulties in the rental marketplace as a result of the advantage obtained over other landlords of similar residential property.

The Deputy may be aware that a Working Group which was set up to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers) recently published its report and it is available on the Budget 2018 website at the following link:

http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2018/Documents/Report_of_the_Working_Group_on_the_Tax_and_Fiscal_Treatment_of_Landlords.pdf

The Group was chaired by the Department of Finance and its membership included the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), Revenue and the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

I am conscious of the challenges that individuals continue to face, despite the improving economic conditions. However, I would also note that the changes to the income tax system included in the last four Budgets mean that most individuals have seen reductions in their income tax bills for four successive years, where incomes are equal.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

55. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that banks insert into all mortgage-to-rent agreements that the bank or financial institution can come back to the person who participates in the scheme for the balance of the mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52340/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Finance does not have a role in administering the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, which is the responsibility of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Housing Agency.

The Central Bank have informed me that they do not have a role in relation to whether banks insert into all mortgage to rent legal documents that the bank or financial institution can come back to the person that participates in the scheme for the balance of the mortgage.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Housing Agency have informed me that they always make it clear in operating the MTR scheme that any debt remaining after the sale of the property by the lender to an Approved Housing Body (subsequent to its voluntary surrender by the borrower to their lender) is a contractual matter between the lender and the borrower. The operator of the scheme does not have sight of how lenders treat the residual debt and does not nor could it impose any obligation on lenders in this regard. Rather the focus of the scheme, which is a social housing option, is to keep people eligible for social housing support in their homes where possible.

Tax Appeals Commission

56. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tax appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission; the value of tax these disputes amount to; the appeals by the number below €10,000, between €10,000 and €50,000, between €50,000 and €1 million, between €1 million and €5 million and the number above €5 million, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52359/17]

57. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the age and value of tax appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission by those aged 0 to 1 year old, between 2 and 5 years old, between 6 and 10 years old and those more the 10 years old, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52360/17]

58. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new appeals brought before the Tax Appeals Commission in each month since January 2016; the number of cases concluded in each month since January 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52361/17]

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission that have been concluded since January 2016 that have been settled; the value settled; the number that have been withdrawn; the value these amounted to;

the number of cases that have been heard; the value these appeals amounted to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52362/17]

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the average timeframe it takes for a tax appeal in the Tax Appeals Commission to take from the submission of the appeal to its conclusion; the average timeframe it takes between a hearing being heard and the determination been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52363/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 to 60, inclusive, together.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to compile the information requested by the Deputy in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly with the information as soon as possible.

Tax Appeals Commission

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of full-time tax commissioners working for the Tax Appeals Commission; the number of part-time commissioners; the number of all other staff both part-time and full-time working for the commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52364/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since its establishment in March 2016, the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) has had two full time Commissioners. An additional temporary Commissioner was appointed in June 2017 for a period of at least two years to assist mainly in the disposing of the legacy cases which transferred to the TAC from the Revenue Commissioners.

The Commission currently comprises the following administrative staff in addition to the aforementioned Commissioners:

Principal Officer: 1

Assistant Principal: 2

Higher Executive Officer: 1.5

Executive Officer: 2

Clerical Officer: 3.

The TAC has a recruitment campaign underway in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service to engage tax-qualified staff to assist with tax appeals.

Tax Appeals Commission

62. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the annual interest charged on appeals outstanding that are with the Tax Appeals Commission; if interest is paid by the Revenue Commissioners for holding money that has been determined by the Tax Appeals Commission as being wrongfully collected; if so, the annual interest rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52365/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that while a matter is subject to an appeal to the Tax Appeals Commission, the collection of the amount of

tax that is in dispute is suspended until the appeal is determined by the Tax Appeals Commission. Where the Tax Appeals Commission find in favour of Revenue, and the tax is found to be due and payable, the original due date in respect of that tax continues to apply for interest purposes. Appellants can make protective payments to Revenue in advance of the determination to minimise their potential exposure to interest charges.

Interest payable on outstanding income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax in respect of a given period of late payment is set out in section 1080 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997). The current interest rate on overdue tax in respect of income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, gift and inheritance tax is currently 0.0219% per day which equates to an annual rate of 7.92%. The current interest rate on overdue tax in respect of taxes such as VAT and PAYE is currently 0.0274% per day, which equates to an annual rate of 10%, as set out in section 114 of the Value Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 (VATCA 2010) and section 991 of the TCA 1997.

Where the Tax Appeals Commission finds in favour of the appellant there may be an overpayment of tax to be repaid. Section 865A of TCA 1997 states that where a repayment of direct taxes arises to a taxpayer for a chargeable period due to a mistaken assumption by Revenue in applying tax legislation, interest is payable on the amount overpaid for each day after the end of the period in question or, if later, the date on which the tax was paid, until the date on which the repayment is made. Interest is payable at the rate of 0.011% per day, which equates to an annual rate of 4.015%. Section 105 of the VATCA 2010 provides for the same rate in respect of VAT refunds as a result of a mistaken assumption by Revenue. Interest is not payable in these circumstances where the overpaid tax is offset against outstanding tax and/or returns are outstanding or where the amount of interest is less than €10.

VAT Rate Application

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the European VAT rules for newspapers and print media; if it is possible under the current or proposed rules to move the industry to zero rated; if it will remain the case that a country is only permitted two lower rates of VAT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52368/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While various proposals on VAT rates have taken place, and are due to take place, at EU level, the current EU VAT rules remain. Each Member State must apply a standard VAT rate of 15% or more, and can apply up to two reduced VAT rates of more than 5%. Ireland applies the 23%, 13.5% and 9% VAT rates in this context. Member States may also retain historic VAT rate treatment where such VAT rating was in place on and from 1 January 1991. Ireland's 4.8% super-reduced rate and the zero rate, and most of the activity applying at the 13.5% rate, fit into this category.

The historical VAT rates, including the zero rate, cannot apply to new goods and services that were not charged at those rates in 1991. As newspapers were not charged at the zero rate of VAT on 1 January 1991, it is not possible to apply the zero rate to them now. Books were charged at the zero rate before 1991, and so they continue to avail of the zero rate. Furthermore, EU law provides that electronically supplied books or newspapers must be charged at the standard VAT rate (23% in Ireland).

On 1 December 2016, as part of the Digital Single Market strategy and the VAT Action Plan, the Commission published four proposals that aimed to modernise VAT on e-commerce. Included in this package was a proposal to modernise and harmonise the VAT rating of books and publications so that Member States would have the power to apply any rate, including the

zero rate, to books and publications supplied electronically or in physical format. This proposal was brought forward for agreement at ECOFIN on 16 June 2017, but was vetoed because of a dispute between two Member States. The Estonian Presidency focused on the other three VAT on e-commerce proposals, which were adopted on 5 December 2017, but the e-books proposal has not been revisited since the June ECOFIN meeting.

However, the Commission is due to publish a general VAT rates proposal in January 2018. It is expected that the proposal will aim to relax the ruling governing the application of VAT rating by EU Member States. This comes in the light of the move to charging VAT on cross-border EU trade in the country of the consumer, where VAT rating is less of a competitive advantage.

The future VAT rating of newspaper and print media will depend on the outcome of these proposals.

Stamp Duty

64. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance the stamp duty that applies to a site of less than one acre which is intended for one off housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52382/17]

65. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance if a site of less than one acre that is used for the development of one dwelling within 30 months can qualify for the refund scheme under the Finance Act 2017; the conditions that must be satisfied prior to the refund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52383/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

As they both relate to the Stamp Duty treatment of the acquisition of a site of less than an acre which is intended for one off housing.

I am advised by Revenue that, based on the information provided, the site would be treated as non-residential property at the time of acquisition. The rate of Stamp Duty on the purchase or voluntary transfer of non-residential property was increased to 6% by way of Budget Day Resolution and applies in relation to all relevant conveyances executed after midnight on Budget day.

During the Report Stage of Finance Bill 2017, I introduced a Stamp Duty refund scheme. This scheme is intended to stimulate the provision of residential accommodation by providing for a partial refund of stamp duty paid on the acquisition of land where that land is used for the development of housing.

In relation to a site used for a single house, the scheme will allow for a refund of 2/3 of the stamp duty paid on the acquisition of the site where the area occupied by the house, including its curtilage, does not exceed 1 acre (.4047 Hectares). Where the area of the site exceeds this amount the refund will be capped at 2/3 of the amount referable to .4047 Hectares.

The main conditions for availing of the refund are that the purchaser must have paid 6% stamp duty when acquiring the land, construction work must have commenced within 30 months of the land being purchased and the house must be completed within two years of the commencement of construction.

Estimates Publication

66. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Supplementary Estimates for public services for 2017 published to date; the EU and national rules regarding the provision of funding for Supplementary Estimates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52339/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Managing expenditure within their voted allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and their Departments. At the end of October overall gross voted expenditure of €46 billion was 0.8% below profile. However, given the cash basis of Government accounting and the scale of gross voted expenditure, over €58 billion in aggregate for 2017, Supplementary Estimates play an important role in achieving proper alignment of funding allocations with planned expenditure. The need for Supplementary Estimates can arise from policy decisions, overruns, timing issues or shifts in expenditure requirements. Additional expenditure requirements in one Department may be offset by underspends in other areas.

The procedures in relation to Supplementary Estimates, both substantive and technical, are set out in Public Financial Procedures. As there is no facility provided under Public Financial Procedures for negative Supplementary Estimates, offsetting voted expenditure underspends in Votes not requiring Supplementary Estimates are not reflected in the aggregate amount below.

The aggregate amount in respect of Supplementary Estimates is €0.49 billion. The amounts by Vote are set out in the table.

Supplementary Estimates proposed for 2017

Substantive Supplementary Estimates

Vote	Amount(€m)
Vote 5 – Director of Public Prosecutions	0.4
Vote 12 – Superannuation and Retired Allowances	6.5
Vote 17 – Public Appointments Service	0.7
Vote 20 – An Garda Síochána	44.2
Vote 26 – Education and Skills	124
Vote 34 – Housing, Planning and Local Government	100
Vote 35 – Army Pensions	10.7
Vote 37 – Employment Affairs and Social Protection	10
Vote 38 – Health	195

Technical Supplementary Estimates

Vote	Amount(€m)
Vote 30 – Agriculture, Food and the Marine	0.001
Vote 31 – Transport, Tourism and Sport	0.001
Vote 32 – Business, Enterprise and Innovation	0.001

As we are operating under the fiscal rules that apply under the preventative arm of the

Stability and Growth Pact, Supplementary Estimates can only be provided where they can be accommodated within the requirements of the fiscal rules, in terms of the projected structural budget balance and the application of the Expenditure Benchmark.

Looking at compliance with the Expenditure Benchmark, when compared to the projections set out on Budget day in October this year, the Supplementary Estimates that have been proposed this year would have an estimated impact of c. 0.1% of GDP on compliance with this fiscal rule. However, this does not take account of offsetting underspends to be surrendered at year-end that would mitigate this impact. Given the aggregate underspends at the end of October and November this year, and the amounts surrendered to the Exchequer last year, it would be expected that such underspends would reduce this potential impact.

Flood Prevention Measures

67. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of flood defence measures for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52424/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I have been advised that the Office of Public Works approved funding of €148,370 in October 2017 under its Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection scheme to Kerry County Council for localised flood relief works at Clieveragh, Listowel, Co Kerry.

The implementation of these works is a matter for the Council and I understand that the Council is currently progressing the necessary site investigation surveys, detailed design and preparation of tender documents for the project.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

68. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 121 of 29 November 2017, the process by which external members of TLAC are appointed; the qualifications and skill sets sought relative to external members; the level of professional human resources qualifications of each member; the rationale behind the decision to have two ex officio members; the skillsets required by the two Secretaries General appointed; the process by which they are selected and appointed; the attendance record of each member; the number of occasions when a split decision occurred in terms of an appointment; the way in which such a decision is dealt with; the number of persons appointed to vacancies that had no connection with the civil or public service out of the 615 appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52475/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) operates in an independent manner and strictly on the basis of open competition and merit. TLAC is responsible for determining its own procedures and remit, subject to Government decisions as appropriate. All TLAC interviews are conducted by sub-panels of the Top Level Appointments Committee each comprising two Secretaries General, two external members and chaired by the TLAC Chairperson.

The process for the appointment of internal and external members to TLAC is undertaken by the Chair of TLAC and the Secretary General of the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, with input from the Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach.

The criteria for selection of external and internal TLAC members includes experience in HR; Senior Management leadership experience; Public Service management experience; functional experience in Strategy, Operations, HR, Finance, IT. Legal; Corporate Services; or other relevant senior functional experience.

All final interviews are conducted by sub-panels of the Committee, each comprising two civil service and three external members and chaired by an external member. There is adequate rotation among the members in the composition of boards.

Since early 2007 when the policy for open competitions for Assistant Secretary and Deputy Secretary and equivalent posts was first introduced, circa thirty six people were appointed from outside the civil service.

Flood Prevention Measures

69. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if additional drainage schemes will be put in place in counties Laois and Offaly in view of recent floods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52446/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for maintaining Arterial Drainage schemes completed under the 1945 Arterial drainage Act. The Boyne and Brosna Arterial Drainage Catchments contain scheme channels in Counties Laois and Offaly. In 2017, 98km of river channel was maintained in Offaly and 15km of river channel was maintained in Laois. The 2018 Boyne and Brosna maintenance programme will include 127km of river channel in Offaly and 3km of river channel in Laois.

Separately, Local Authorities are responsible for the maintenance of Drainage Districts in their area. I am engaging with the Minister of Housing, Planning and Local Government to examine the funding available for Local Authorities to fulfil these obligations.

Flood Prevention Measures

70. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if additional flood defences will be put in place in the midlands as a result of recent flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52447/17]

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 Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. This Programme is focussing on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs), mainly in urban locations nationwide, identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding. Seven AFAs were identified in County Laois, five were identified in County Longford, nine were identified in County Offaly and three were identified in County Westmeath.

Feasible flood risk measures, both structural and non-structural, were identified in draft flood risk management plans which were the subject of public consultation in 2016. The final Plans are currently undergoing an independent review of the environmental assessments by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I would hope early in 2018, to seek the approval from the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for the Flood Risk Management Plans developed under the CFRAM

process.

Thereafter, I would hope to announce the proposed structural measures contained within those Plans that will be taken, through a prioritised approach over the coming years, to detailed design to protect those communities at assessed risk.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the OPW recently advertised in the national press for guides and sought information on age and marital status on the application form in breach of equality legislation; and the steps he has taken to ensure it does not happen again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52460/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): In their standard annual application process for Seasonal Guides for Heritage visitor sites, the OPW routinely seeks key information from prospective candidates in order to progress the selection process. The online application form for the 2018 season can be viewed at <https://www.opw.ie/en/seasonal-guide-recruitment-form/>

Information in relation to specific date of birth is sought in order to ensure that the OPW remains compliant with certain regulatory requirements in relation to age. The OPW requires firstly that candidates are over 18 by the 1st January of the year of recruitment in order to comply with its policy in relation to employment of persons below that age and for reasons of child protection. There is also a further requirement that candidates be under the age of 70 at time of contract start date since the employment is pensionable in accordance with the terms of the Single Public Service Pensions Scheme (as defined in the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012), and retirement is compulsory on reaching 70 years of age. A simple tick box stating that the candidate is over 18 and under 70 would not fully capture the necessary information sufficiently accurately in all cases and a specific date of birth detail is therefore sought.

Details of marital status are not sought at any stage in the OPW's recruitment processes and the online application form for the current recruitment process does not have a question in respect of this.

The OPW is cognisant of the importance of a robust approach where issues of personal data are concerned and, given ongoing developments in respect to data protection, will keep this issue under review to ensure that, if personal data is being sought without a firm basis, or if data is incorrectly handled in any way, it will be in a position to change its approach accordingly.

Third Level Education

72. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the report compiled by Dublin City University regarding the BA course run by a college (details supplied); the conclusions his officials have drawn from the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52323/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have received a copy of the research report prepared by the team involved in the Adult Learning BA (ALBA) for Personal and Professional Development. The ALBA Programme was offered at All Hallows College in Drumcondra and was accredited by DCU. When All Hallows College closed, DCU

facilitated the completion of ALBA by existing students.

The ALBA Programme sought to provide a flexible, learner-centred and competency-based offering for adult learners. The case study records positive impacts on education and lifelong learning; transversal skills; self-confidence and self-development; amongst others. I received the report approximately 2 weeks ago and an official from my Department met with some members of the ALBA team on 4 December to discuss its findings. I have asked my officials to give further consideration to the report and to identify what lessons might usefully inform the design of programmes offered by higher education institutions in attracting, retaining and meeting the needs of adult learners.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

73. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who have applied to Caranua for support; the number of applications that have been granted for each year since its establishment to date; the number and value of awards given in each year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52324/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. The legislation provides that €110 million in contributions from religious congregations will be made available to Caranua to help meet the needs of persons who, as children, were abused in residential institutions. To date some €101million, comprising contributions and associated interest, has been received from congregations and deposited in the special investment account opened by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) in accordance with section 29 of the 2012 Act.

Caranua's annual reports which may be accessed on its website (www.caranua.ie) provide extensive details regarding the organisation's activities including information regarding the number of applications received and the number of persons in receipt of supports and various related matters. Caranua also provides regular updates on its website in regard to these matters. The most recent published update, which provides figures to 30 September 2017, indicates that in the period from its establishment in March 2013 to that date Caranua had received 6,024 applications and had expended some €66.2 million in support of 4,886 applicants.

Higher Education Authority Expenditure

74. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 161 of 28 November 2017, if his attention has been drawn to Circuit Court Record No. 2006/07275 (details supplied); if so, if his attention has been further drawn to the expenditure to date by this institution on this action; the amount expended to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52330/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA institutions. The HEA allocates this as a block grant to institutions to cover teaching, research and administration. The internal allocation of this grant is a matter for each institution. Higher education institutions are autonomous institutions and my Department does not have any function in their day to day operational affairs, including the management of legal cases and their associated costs.

I understand that this specific issue relates to admission to an academic programme. Higher education institutions have direct responsibility for determining the criteria for entry to their academic courses. My Department does not have any involvement in such matters.

Minor Works Scheme

75. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be awarded a minor works grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52356/17]

77. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the position of a school (details supplied) in relation to the minor works and other funding requirements will be examined; the best course of action for the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52384/17]

81. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the minor works grant has not been made available to schools to date in 2017; when the grant will become available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52388/17]

82. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a minor works grant can be made available for a school (details supplied). [52389/17]

87. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if payment of a minor works grant to a school (details supplied) in County Leitrim will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52496/17]

88. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the minor works scheme will be introduced. [52580/17]

90. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a minor works scheme grant for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52589/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75, 77, 81, 82, 87, 88 and 90 together.

I am pleased to advise that on Tuesday I announced the Minor Works Grant 2017/2018 for primary schools across the country and payment will issue next week.

The funding will allow minor works to be carried out on the physical infrastructure of schools or on the purchase of items of furniture and equipment.

School Transport Provision

76. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the operation of school bus transport with particular regard to children using the system on a concessionary basis will be reviewed; if he will review the operation of the school transport for Celbridge (details supplied); if he will extend the service to facilitate children living in Newcastle village; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52357/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Depart-

ment.

Currently over 114,000 children, including over 11,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

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

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

The children referred to by the Deputy are not eligible for school transport and may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of conditions, including the following:

- Routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis; no additional State cost will be incurred.

Arising from commitments in the Programme for Government, a review of the Concessionary Charges and Rules element of the School Transport Scheme was undertaken.

The review was published in December 2016 and made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

With regard to the charges for concessionary school transport the recommended course of action was to continue with the current position whereby charges remain in place for those in receipt of concessionary places. I agree with this recommendation on the basis that those applying for concessionary transport are making a conscious decision to do so and understand the implications of this choice at the time of application.

The report also recommended that the number of concessionary places should be reduced in line with the rules introduced in 2012 on a phased basis. Previous plans to advance this option were put on hold, pending the completion of the review.

However upon consideration of the review and following discussions with the Cross-Party Working Group which I established to feed into the review, I decided that there should be no planned programme of downsizing in the coming years except in line with normal operational decisions within the current scheme.

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

Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 75.

Special Educational Needs

78. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review his Department's approach to applied behaviour analysis schooling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52385/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's policy is to promote a child-centred approach to education of all children with special educational needs,

including those with autism, in school settings.

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

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special class and special school placements.

As each child with autism is unique, they should have access to a range of different approaches to meet their individual needs. This facilitates access to individualised education programmes which can be supported by Special Needs Assistants and fully qualified professional teachers who may draw from a range of autism-specific interventions, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Treatment and Education of Autistic Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and Picture Exchange Communications System (PECS) as well as the appropriate school curriculum with the option, where possible, of full or partial integration and interaction with other pupils.

The use of ABA as part of the range of interventions may be particularly useful for addressing behavioural issues. My Department supports the use of ABA and training is provided for teachers in its use.

However, my Department does not accept, based on research, advice and best practice, that ABA should be the only approach used. While ABA may help to improve behaviour, other approaches, such as a number of those, to which I have referred, are just as important in developing children's communication and speech skills.

All recognised schools must operate in line with this policy. This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and the NCSE's policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016). I have no plans to further review this policy.

Home Tuition Scheme

79. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children with autism spectrum disorder and similar conditions who have been granted home tuition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52386/17]

80. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to centralise the home tutor selection and allocation process. [52387/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 and 80 together.

The purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for

(a) Early educational intervention for children with autism who meet the schemes eligibility criteria

(b) Students with special educational needs seeking an educational placement in a recognised school

(c) Students, enrolled in schools, with significant medical conditions which has caused, and is likely to continue to cause, major disruption to their attendance at school

The preferred approach is that children are educated in school settings where children may have access to fully qualified teachers, individualised education programmes, special needs assistants, school curriculum with the option, where possible and appropriate, of full or partial integration and interaction with other students.

Accordingly, Home Tuition is provided as an interim measure only for children for whom a placement in a recognised school is not available and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a school placement.

In relation to the early intervention strand of the scheme, the Home Tuition Grant is provided for children aged between 2.5 and 3 years of age with an ASD diagnosis.

When these children reach the age of 3 they will be eligible to enrol in a state supported early intervention or preschool setting. Home Tuition is provided for children with ASD over 3 years of age (who will not reach the age of 6 during the 2016/17 school year), who meet the schemes eligibility criteria, and for whom an early intervention placement is not available, as confirmed by the NCSE.

Children with Special Educational Needs, including those with ASD, who are over the age of four may avail of Home tuition where a school placement is not available as confirmed by the NCSE, through the local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO).

My Department sanctioned home tuition grants for 1,038 children with ASD in the 2016/17 school year. A breakdown of these children by age is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Home Tuition Grants for Children with ASD 2016/17 school year

Age	No. of Children
2.5-3 Years	182
3 - 5 years (incl. 131 children who turned 3 during school year)	798
6 years and over	58
Total	1,038

The Home Tuition grant scheme allows Parents/guardians to engage eligible tutors for the provision of Home Tuition in a private arrangement.

As tuition takes place outside the usual school structure it is important that the educational programme provided generally reflects that which would be provided in a school environment.

It is appropriate therefore that the qualification standard for Home Tuition generally reflects that required in a school environment. Accordingly, it is a condition of the scheme that parents/guardians must recruit a tutor who is qualified in the relevant sector, and is registered with the Teaching Council, similar to the requirement for teachers in schools.

Where all efforts have failed to secure the services of a teacher qualified to teach in the sector concerned, the Department may consider the engagement of a person who is registered with the Teaching Council and has a primary degree (minimum Level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications) in a relevant area.

As it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to source a tutor to provide tuition for their child, tutors do not have a contractual relationship with my Department. This Department acts

solely as a payroll agent on behalf of the parent/guardian by issuing the home tuition grant directly to the approved tutor.

I have no plans at present to change this arrangement.

Questions Nos. 81 and 82 answered with Question No. 75.

Schools Building Projects Status

83. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposed major building project at a school (details supplied). [52406/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school project referred to by the Deputy was recently approved to proceed to Stage 2B - Detailed Design Stage.

Stage 2B - Detailed Design Stage, includes applications for all statutory consents, including Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate and also the preparation of tender documentation.

Schools Site Acquisitions

84. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will request the HSE to take over a former health clinic (details supplied) to facilitate a school expansion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52426/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school referred to has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional accommodation. My Department will be engaging with the school authority shortly in the context of assisting the school to meet these needs.

My Department has no remit over services operated by the HSE.

Special Educational Needs Staff

85. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 186 of 21 November 2017, when his Department will correspond with the school in question; if the status of the school will change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52445/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that further enquiries have been made with the NCSE regarding the staffing position in the school in question.

There are 26 students currently enrolled. There are five teaching posts allocated to the school for five classes.

There are three classes designated for students with Severe - Profound General Learning Disability. There are two classes designated for students with Autism and Moderate - Severe General Learning Disability.

The school also has 17.5 SNA posts.

This provides a ratio of 22.5 adults for 26 children.

The NCSE has advised that the staffing has been reviewed and there has been no change to the staffing at the school. There is therefore no basis for the granting of administrative status to the Principal of the school in question.

In the meantime my officials are in contact with the school concerning arrangements for an individual child.

Legislative Process

86. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he plans to complete the passage of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016. [52477/17]

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

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

Questions Nos. 87 and 88 answered with Question No. 75.

Summer Works Scheme Administration

89. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration has been given to opening the summer works scheme on an annual basis. [52588/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is being applied on a multi-annual basis. The Deputy will also be aware that nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand.

Almost €80 million has been approved to date under the Summer Works Scheme, in respect of over 640 school projects in categories 1-6. Details of the successful school applicants are published on my Department’s website www.education.ie.

The 2018 budgetary provision will allow my Department to meet the carry over costs of summer works projects already approved. The assessment of applications in the remaining categories 7-10 as well as proceeding with any future summer works scheme is reliant on the availability of funding.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 75.

Property Registration Authority Administration

91. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to that which constitutes exceptional circumstances as detailed in an application for sight of documents from the Land Registry; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[52550/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My officials have consulted with the Property Registration Authority. I am advised that the details provided by the Deputy are insufficient to provide a comprehensive reply in this instance. Should the Deputy wish to provide more specific details to facilitate identification of the application in question, the Authority will be happy to re-examine the matter.

Departmental Reviews

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of his departmental review on defamation that was scheduled to conclude in September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52367/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department launched a public consultation on the operation of the Defamation Act 2009 on 1 November 2016. The Review is being undertaken in accordance with Section 5 of that Act.

The key objective of defamation law in Ireland is to ensure effective protection for the right to good name and reputation guaranteed by Article 40.3.2 of the Constitution, while also ensuring due regard for the right to freedom of expression in a democratic society, contained in Article 40.4.1(i). The rights to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and to protection of reputation under Article 8 of the Convention are also relevant.

The overall question posed by the public consultation is whether the 2009 Act strikes the right balance, in practice, between protecting freedom of expression and protecting good name and reputation – taking account of relevant developments such as intervening jurisprudence, changes in other common-law jurisdictions and the increasing importance of digital communications. Specifically, the aims of the public consultation were as follows:

- To promote an exchange of views and experiences regarding the operation in practice of reforms to the 2009 Act,
- To review recent reforms of defamation law in other relevant jurisdictions,
- To examine whether Irish defamation law, and in particular the Defamation Act 2009, remains appropriate and effective for securing its objectives, including in light of any relevant developments since 2009,
- To explore and weigh the arguments (and evidence) for and against any proposed changes in Irish defamation law intended to better respond to its objectives, and
- To publish the outcomes of the review, with recommendations on appropriate follow-up measures

The Department received 41 submissions to the review from a wide variety of stakeholders. The submissions are published and available on the Department's website. The timeframe for the review was extended due to requests by stakeholders for more time to prepare their submissions, the complexity of the issues, the wide scope of the submissions received, other urgent legislative priorities, and significant intervening judgments of relevance from the European Court of Human Rights and the Supreme Court.

My Department has carried out extensive work on the review and I expect to receive a final

report, with options for potential reform in this area of law, during the first quarter of 2018.

Stardust Fire

93. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the McCartan report into the Stardust fire failed to accept evidence from witnesses, including 35 external witnesses, despite an earlier commitment to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52394/17]

94. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the McCartan report into the Stardust fire failed to accept evidence written by witnesses that had subsequently passed away. [52395/17]

95. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the McCartan report into the Stardust fire failed to interview a person (details supplied) during the assessment. [52396/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 to 95, inclusive, together.

A motion was passed by this House on 26th January 2017 which called on the Government “to meet with the Stardust Relatives and Victims Committee regarding the new and updated evidence they have uncovered since reviewing Judge Keane’s Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry on the fire at the Stardust, Artane, Dublin in 2006, to have that new and updated evidence assessed urgently by an independent person who has the trust of the families”; and “If the independent assessment confirms the existence of new evidence, calls on the Government to immediately establish a Commission of Investigation into the Stardust Tragedy of 1981.”

The Stardust Relatives and Victims Committee identified (now retired) Judge Pat McCartan as an independent person who had their trust and, having been contacted by officials from my Department, Judge McCartan indicated his willingness to assist by taking on the role of assessing the evidence. The scope of the assessment process was as set out in the Dáil Motion.

The assessment process was conducted independently of Government in line with that Dáil Motion. Judge McCartan interpreted the scope of his independent process within those parameters. It was not open to me as Minister, nor my Department, to interfere with that process and direct him to hear evidence from any specific witnesses.

Judge McCartan’s assessment report was formally submitted to my Department on 17 October 2017. I brought the report to the Cabinet meeting on 7 November 2017. The report was accepted by the Government and furnished to the Stardust Victims’ Committee immediately afterwards.

I published the report later on 7 November and also laid the report before the Houses of the Oireachtas on the same date, given that the assessment process was initiated on foot of a Dáil Motion in January.

I would like to express my gratitude to Judge McCartan for the work he undertook in preparing his report. The judge was nominated by the relatives as a person they trusted and I am grateful to him for his willingness to undertake this important public service.

Having carefully considered the two previous independent reports on the Stardust tragedy and considered all material made available to him, Judge McCartan concluded that no further

new enquiry is warranted.

The Stardust Fire was undoubtedly one of the greatest tragedies in the history of this country and the Government established this independent assessment process to ensure that all available evidence, including any new material that may have come to light, could be assessed as a matter of urgency. I acknowledge the terrible pain and loss of the relatives of the victims and the fact that the report does not come to the conclusion that they would have wished for.

Direct Provision System

96. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the conditions in which persons resident in a building (details supplied) are trying to exist; the way in which the building passed inspections carried out by the Reception and Integration Agency and a fire safety company hired by it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52404/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): My Department has recently been made aware of complaints in relation to the accommodation centre in question. These complaints have been forwarded onto the contractor and a full report has been requested as soon as possible. Any and all appropriate action to remedy any identified defect will immediately be addressed.

All accommodation centres under contract to the Department are inspected by staff from the Reception and Integration Agency and by an independent inspector, QTS Health and Safety Limited. Inspection Reports are available to view on www.ria-inspections.gov.ie. The format of the inspections require visual inspection of all bedrooms, communal areas, kitchens and fire exits.

The accommodation centre in question has been inspected three times in 2017 - once by QTS Health and Safety Limited on the 12th April and twice by two different staff members from the Reception and Integration Agency - on the 29th June and as recently as the 29th November.

All accommodation centres are also subject to inspection by other State inspectors such as the environmental health service, the fire service and the Data Protection Commissioner.

Each centre under contract to the Department is required to have a current and active fire certificate renewed on a yearly basis. In the case of the accommodation centre in question the latest fire certificate covers the period to 14th September 2018.

Residents of the centre (or indeed any accommodation centre) have the possibility to register a complaint in relation to the accommodation centre with the Manager or with an inspector as the case may be. The only complaint raised by a resident during the inspections mentioned above was on the 29th June 2017 and that was in relation to a transfer.

In addition to the foregoing it is always open to any resident in the centre in question to make a complaint to the Ombudsman about any matter in relation to their accommodation at that centre.

Wards of Court

97. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the annual report of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice does not contain information regarding the

financial transactions in or by the Office of the General Solicitor for Wards. [52407/17]

98. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if information in regard to the financial transactions, costs and charges related to the office of the general solicitor for wards will be included in the annual report of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice for 2017 and an addendum included to the 2017 annual report containing such information for all the years for which it has not been provided. [52408/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the General Solicitor's role in wardship is that of Committee of a number of wards of court. Committees of wards of court, including the General Solicitor, are put in funds by the Registrar of Wards of Court from monies held by the Court or from income received, to meet the costs associated with the care, maintenance and comfort of the ward.

The General Solicitor is obliged to apply to the Registrar of Wards of Court and, if necessary, to the Court for approval for any major purchase on behalf of a ward of court. Furthermore, the General Solicitor accounts to the Registrar of Wards of Court in relation to income received and payments made on behalf of a ward and is subject to audit by the internal auditor of the Courts Service.

The Accountant of the Courts of Justice manages and invests funds held under the control of the Courts on behalf of wards of court and other beneficiaries. The financial statements prepared by the Accountant are prepared in accordance with Rules of Court to show the total amount of funds paid or transferred into and out of Court in the preceding year ended 30 September and the balance of funds in Court at the commencement and close of the year.

The Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice does not have sight of the individual transactions discharged by the General Solicitor in the same way as it does not have sight of the individual transactions for any other Committees of wards of court. Therefore, as information in regard to the financial transactions, costs and charges related to the Office of the General Solicitor for Wards do not come within the remit of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice and the Accountant of the Courts of Justice does not have access to such information, as is the case with all Committees, such information is not included in the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice for 2017 and an addendum containing such information for 2017 or previous years will not be included.

Residency Permits

99. **Deputy Peadar Kirby** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a visa application (details supplied) for residency has not been processed in over eight years. [52409/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

The case of the person concerned is amongst many to be considered by the Minister at present and, as such, at this point in time, it is not possible to provide a specific indication as to when this case will be finalised. However, the person concerned can be assured that there will be no avoidable delay in having their case brought to finality.

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 Data

100. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991 was invoked in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 by An Garda Síochána; the top three reasons for intervention annually according to the PULSE records for each division, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52418/17]

101. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991 was invoked in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 between the hours of 6 p.m. and 9 a.m.; the number that occurred at the weekend and bank holidays by each division, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52419/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

My Department has sought the information requested by the Deputy from the Garda authorities and I will contact the Deputy directly once this information is to hand.

Pension Provisions

102. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when personal superannuation fund statements for 2015 and 2016, as provided for under the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012, are required to be issued to gardaí recruited since 2012; when they will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52431/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána.

The new Single Public Service Pension Scheme ("Single Scheme") commenced with effect from 1 January 2013. All new entrants to pensionable public service employment on or after 1 January 2013 are, in general members of the Single Scheme.

The Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 (Relevant

Authorities) Regulations 2012 designates An Garda Síochána as the relevant authority for the purposes of the Single Scheme and I, as Minister, have no role in relation to the matter.

As part of this delegation the Commissioner is the trustee of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme and, as such, is responsible for meeting all legal requirements regarding same e.g. maintaining pension records for new staff, issuing pension statements on an annual basis and the actual payment of pensions and lump sums to both serving and non-serving employees.

I am informed that An Garda Síochána is participating in a Sectoral Focus Group regarding the Single Scheme. This group is part of a project led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to develop solutions to support compliance with all legal requirements on the part of trustees of this new Single Scheme. The group provides input on the direction of work being undertaken on the Single Scheme project, assesses impacts on their sectors and recommends approaches/engagement required.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform-led project entails, as part of the next phase, the building of a Single scheme Databank that will hold key data centrally. This will be complemented by the Shared Services Centres and Human Resources areas which will continue to have a critical role in providing payroll and other information. The last phase of this project will involve designing the long-term solution so all relevant authorities including An Garda Síochána are compliant with all legal requirements as trustees of this new scheme.

I am advised that An Garda Síochána will issue Benefit Statements when the project as outlined above has progressed to roll out phase.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

103. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of refugees admitted here under the resettlement and relocation programmes; if the target of accepting 4,000 refugees by the end of 2017 will be reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52459/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State. Of these, 2,622 were by means of the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece. A further 1,040 were to be sourced under the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programme currently focussed on resettling refugees from Lebanon, and the balance through a variety of mechanisms. It should be noted that Ireland voluntarily opted into the two EU Council Decisions on Relocation (2015/1523) and (2015/1601), which provided for the relocation of 160,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece.

The Government Decision to accept 4,000 persons into the State did not contain a time limit of September 2017 but the relocation mechanism, in particular, did carry a time limit of approximately two years. As I set out below significant issues arose with that mechanism which made it impossible for Ireland to deliver on the numbers allocated to it, primarily because those numbers do not actually exist on the ground in the relevant counties. Hence, the Government has had to find other mechanisms to deliver on the commitment by Ireland.

Under the programme refugee resettlement strand of the Programme, 356 persons arrived in

Ireland during 2016. Taken together with the previous year's intake, Ireland had taken in 519 of its original commitment of 520 by the end of 2016, a year ahead of schedule. Last year, the Government doubled its commitment under resettlement to 1,040 and the total who have arrived from Lebanon under refugee resettlement now stands at 785. The balance are expected to arrive in early 2018. The European Commission recognises Ireland as being one of only seven EU Member States to have fulfilled their resettlement pledges from the July 2015 Agreement.

Ireland committed to accept 2,622 asylum seekers under the relocation strand of the IRPP. This total was composed of 1,089 people from Greece, 623 people from Italy and 910 people that were "unallocated" by the Commission. Ireland plans to meet in full its commitment to Greece. 693 of the allocation of 1,089 are already in the State, with a further 62 persons scheduled for arrival in December 2017. By early 2018, it is expected that Ireland will have relocated its entire cohort from Greece (1,089), subject of course to the Greek authorities submitting the small number of remaining case files to Ireland and the ability of local authorities to find homes in communities around Ireland.

However, Italy, unlike Greece, did not permit security assessments to be undertaken by other States on its territory. Accordingly, Ireland has been unable to undertake security assessments in Italy of the asylum seeker cohort eligible for relocation to Ireland. It has therefore not been possible for Ireland to take asylum seekers from Italy despite the most intensive efforts by Ireland to resolve the impasse, both bilaterally with Italian counterparts at official, diplomatic and Ministerial level, and at EU level.

In terms of the unallocated portion contained in the two EU Council Decisions referred to above, which in the case of Ireland amounts to 910 persons, Ireland could not access this component because the EU did not ultimately decide to operationalise this additional commitment. In fact, the Deputy may wish to note that by the end of the two-year EU Relocation Programme in September 2017, just 37,000 asylum seekers were eligible and registered for relocation in Italy and Greece out of an total of 160,000 comprehended by the two Council Decisions, of which 78% (approximately 29,000) had been relocated to other EU Member States including Ireland. It should be noted that proportionally Ireland has taken one of the highest numbers under the EU Relocation Programme. Once the final transfers from Greece take place early next year, Ireland will have relocated more than 3% of the EU's total figure. This represents a strong commitment by Ireland to EU solidarity, given that we represent less than 1% of the total population of the EU.

Ireland has worked to give effect to the EU relocation Decisions and will fill any gaps arising from the relocation instruments using other mechanisms such as pledges for resettlement of programme refugees. To address the balance of approximately 1,800 people under the IRPP, which arises largely due to the significantly smaller number of asylum seekers eligible and registered under the EU relocation programme, I have recently announced additional resettlement pledges for 2018 and 2019 amounting to an additional commitment of about 945 refugees, and the establishment of a new Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme (FR-HAP). The resettlement pledges are the largest commitments for resettlement that we have made in a calendar year since our national resettlement programme began in 2000. They have been made in the context of a European Commission/UNHCR resettlement pledging exercise for 2018/2019, which aims to provide 50,000 resettlement places across the European Union over the two-year period.

As the Deputy is also aware, following the adoption of the All-Party Motion last November, on the Calais Unaccompanied Minors, a concerted effort has been made to provide a pathway here for such unaccompanied minors who wished to come to Ireland. The Departments of Children and Youth Affairs and Justice and Equality, established the Calais Special Project

within Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Working directly with the French authorities, any unaccompanied minors who have been identified as suitable for relocation here have been accepted and provided with the appropriate supports and no unaccompanied minor who has asked to come to Ireland has been refused. A total of 30 young persons have been relocated under this programme to-date. There are an additional 11 children who have been assessed and are awaiting security clearance before travel arrangement can be made for them. In addition to the children that have been brought to Ireland under the Calais Special Project an additional 6 young people from Syria have been admitted to Ireland under the EU Relocation Programme from Greece.

In all the circumstances, I can state that Ireland is making every possible effort to meet its commitments, the commitment by Ireland to accept 4,000 persons remains and that Ireland will fill any gaps arising from the relocation instruments using other mechanisms such as pledges for resettlement of programme refugees. I am working to ensure that Ireland will meet its commitments by 2019.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Data

104. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of section 102(1) referrals to GSOC from Garda headquarters in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017 relating to cases in which there was no death involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52493/17]

105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of section 83(2) complaints received by An Garda Síochána that were referred to GSOC in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52494/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 105 together.

The following information has been provided to my Department by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission upon request.

I can advise the Deputy that complaints made under section 83(2) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 are those that are either made directly to the Garda Commissioner, to a member of An Garda Síochána at a Garda station, or to a Garda member at or above the rank of chief superintendent at a place other than a Garda station.

Such complaints are commonly referred by GSOC as section 85 complaints, taking into consideration the section of the Act that provides for An Garda Síochána to forward these complaints to GSOC.

To facilitate the public in making a complaint at a Garda station, GSOC provides complaint forms (GSOC1 forms) that can be completed by a member of a public at a Garda station and submitted to GSOC from there. GSOC has advised that as both referrals by An Garda Síochána and the GSOC1 forms, submitted to a Garda station by a member of the public, are identified as originating from An Garda Síochána, their case management system classifies the Method of Receipt of Complaint as “Garda Station”.

In relation to section 102(1) referrals made to GSOC by An Garda Síochána, this information is published in the Ombudsman Commission’s annual report. The power to refer such matters under this section to GSOC is delegated by the Garda Commissioner to Superintendents.

This responsibility involves a decision by those appropriate officers as to whether an incident involving the conduct of a member of An Garda Síochána may have caused the death or serious harm to a person, and may warrant independent investigation.

For convenience, I am providing the following two tables, the first of which indicates the number of section 83(2) complaints referred to GSOC and the second table indicates the number of section 102(1) referrals to GSOC from An Garda Síochána that did not involve a fatality.

Complaints made under section 83 (2):

Year	Method of Receipt of Complaint	Number of Complaints
2010	Garda Station	444
2011	Garda Station	458
2012	Garda Station	312
2013	Garda Station	307
2014	Garda Station	306
2015	Garda Station	254
2016	Garda Station	180
2017 (to end of November 2017)	Garda Station	221

Referrals, non-fatal cases, under section 102 (1):

Year	Number of Cases
2010	92
2011	72
2012	59
2013	33
2014	46
2015	38
2016	39
2017 (to end of November 2017)	12

Tribunals of Inquiry

106. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the actions and investigations being taken on foot of the reports of the Moriarty tribunal; the status of these investigations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52497/17]

107. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the status of the investigations by An Garda Síochána and the Director of Public Prosecutions into the findings of the Flood and Mahon tribunals; the stage these investigations are at; when he expects a decision to be reached; if he has set a deadline for this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52498/17]

108. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the status of investigations by An Garda Síochána and the Director of Public Prosecutions into the findings of the Moriarty tribunal; the stage these investigations are at; when he expects a decision to be reached; if he has set a deadline for this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52499/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 to 108, inclusive, together.

The consideration of criminal investigations is clearly a matter for the Garda authorities, and likewise it is a matter for the DPP to decide, independently, if any charges should be brought. It is not open to me, as Minister, to set deadlines in relation to these matters and it would be most inappropriate to attempt to go into the detail of ongoing Garda inquiries. I trust that all members of this House would wish to ensure that nothing is said that might in any way impinge on the progress of subsequent criminal proceedings.

I am advised that the position in relation to these matters remains unchanged at present. I am advised by the Garda authorities that investigations relating to the findings of the Flood and Mahon Tribunals, as well as the investigation of certain matters arising from the report of the Moriarty Tribunal, are ongoing. I am also advised that relevant liaison is maintained by Gardai with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The Deputy will appreciate that investigations of the matters in question may involve very extensive interviews and enquiries. While I do of course appreciate public concern about these matters, I am advised that the overriding concern for An Garda Síochána is to ensure that these investigations are carried out as comprehensively and effectively as possible.

The Government remains committed to supporting An Garda Síochána in pursuing all criminal investigations and this is underlined by the very significant investments which have been made in policing resources – all of which will support enhanced investigation and detection of crime, and benefit ongoing investigations.

This Government has made it abundantly clear that we are entirely committed to tackling corruption, as well as the broader ‘white collar crime’ area. This was evidenced by the significant package of measures we launched last month. The Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Bill has already passed second stage in this House on 15 November 2017 and a date for Committee Stage is awaited.

This Bill includes legislative provision for recommendations arising from the Mahon Tribunal and will substantially advance meeting Ireland’s obligations under a number of international anti-corruption instruments. This major modernisation of corruption offences law will repeal and replace the seven previous Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 to 2010.

Departmental Investigations

109. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date by which the tender process to secure the membership of two academics for the scoping group to consider the availability of data and make recommendations on a study to identify the prevalence of sexual abuse and violence here and emerging trends will be completed. [52500/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): State Departments/agencies have now nominated officials to the scoping group. As the Deputy is aware a tender has issued to secure the membership of 2 academics with appropriate expertise in qualitative and quantitative data gathering. The closing date for tenders from academics is 11 December. It is intended that the selection will be made by the Chair of the Group (Professor Watson of the ESRI) in consultation with Cosc and that this process will be completed within a few days following the closing date for tenders.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

110. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has written to each applicant to the Magdalen restorative justice scheme that was rejected and asserted a longer duration of stay than was accepted by his Department to advise them of their right to reapply in view of the Ombudsman’s recent report, *Opportunity Lost*, on his Department’s administration of the scheme and in particular the Ombudsman’s finding that his Department gave undue weight to the evidence supplied by the religious congregations in determining access to the scheme. [52507/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department is giving full and detailed consideration to each of the four recommendations made by the Ombudsman in his report published on 23 November 2017.

The Ombudsman recommended that there should be a review of any cases where there has been a dispute over length of stay. No particular difficulty is foreseen with this recommendation and my Department is exploring the options for doing so.

The Ombudsman also recommended that certain industrial schools and training centres should also be included in the scheme notwithstanding the fact that such applicants may have already received payments under the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme for the same period. This recommendation raises a number of administrative, resource and legal implications which are currently being examined.

It is important to note that the existing Scheme remains open. To date 684 applicants to the Magdalen scheme have received their ex-gratia payments at a cost of €25.7m. The terms of the scheme recommended to Government by the Justice Quirke included the payment of “lump” sums in a range from €11,500 to €100,000, special access to health care, upgrading of pension entitlements to the full State Pension for those who had reached retirement age, and payment of a weekly sum of €100 inclusive of other State payments to others.

Garda Strength

111. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda personnel attached to the three districts in County Longford in the past seven years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52511/17]

112. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda personnel attached to County Westmeath districts in the past seven years. [52512/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 112 together.

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 Garda strength of the Roscommon/Longford Division on 31 October 2017 was 309 with 9 Garda Reserves and 29 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. The Garda strength of the Westmeath Division on 31 October 2017 was 266 with 13 Garda Reserves and 24 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported

by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

As the Deputy will be aware, this Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To achieve this the Government has put in place a plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 10 and 27 have been assigned to the Roscommon/Longford and Westmeath Divisions respectively. I look forward to attending the graduation of another 200 trainee Gardaí tomorrow 8 December, which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - a net increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that Budget 2018 maintains this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensures that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. This will see Garda numbers reach the 14,000 mark by the end of 2018.

In addition, a further 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Roscommon/Longford and Westmeath Divisions in the coming years.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Roscommon/Longford and Westmeath Districts for the past seven years and as of 31 October 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available are as set out in the following tables.

Strength of the Westmeath Districts

Year	Athlone	Mullingar	Total
2010	93	169	262
2011	92	163	255
2012	92	162	254
2013	87	158	245
2014	85	160	245
2015	86	160	246
2016	86	156	242
2017*	93	173	266

*As of 31 October 2017

Strength of the Roscommon/Longford Districts

Year	Boyle	Castlerea	Granard	Longford	Roscom-mon	Total
2010	41	50	42	76	92	301
2011	35	46	41	74	90	286
2012	36	45	39	73	87	280
2013	-	82	39	78	86	285
2014	-	84	41	78	82	285
2015	-	87	39	84	82	292
2016	-	87	47	87	80	301
2017	-	89	47	88	85	309

As of 31 October 2017

Immigration Status

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 128 of 23 November 2017 regarding the case of a person (details supplied), if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no such permission issued; if the extension to stamp 4 will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52517/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the responsibility for the registration process and confiscated passport of the person concerned, is a matter which must ultimately be resolved between the person concerned and their local Immigration Registration Office.

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

Residency Permits

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if regularisation of residency status can be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52518/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the person referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided. If the Deputy can provide further details such as the person's full name (if different from that already provided), their date of birth, their GNIB Registration Number, a Passport number, I will have the matter investigated further. If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already he or she should do so as soon 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.

Residency Permits

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when consideration will be given to the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52520/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, made on 11 March 2005, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of their asylum claim and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The person concerned, through their legal representative, has made a request to have that Deportation Order revoked, based on the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order.

The person concerned, again through their legal representative, has also sought to be re-admitted to the asylum/protection process, pursuant to the provisions of Section 17 (7) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) and the initial decision in this regard is currently under review. Once a final decision has been arrived at, it will be notified in writing. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision in this instance will be to re-admit, or refuse to re-admit, the person concerned to the asylum/protection process.

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

Asylum Applications

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the result of a refugee appeal will be determined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52521/17]

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

The Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of

Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015 on 27 February 2017, which is available on the website of the International Protection Office www.ipo.gov.ie.

Similarly, the International Protection Appeals Tribunal operate an email which can be contacted by individuals with any queries regarding their application - info@protectionappeals.ie.

Under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international protection applicant. The offence is punishable by summary conviction to a Class A fine or a term of imprisonment of 12 months or both.

Asylum Applications

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the result of a refugee appeal will be determined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52522/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): If an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or their designated legal advisor should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. Similarly, the International Protection Appeals Tribunal operate an email which can be contacted by individuals with any queries regarding their appeal application - info@protectionappeals.ie.

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

Under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international protection applicant. The offence is punishable by summary conviction to a Class A fine or a term of imprisonment of 12 months or both.

Immigration Status

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52523/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an offer of temporary and limited immigration permission (Stamp 0 status) issued to the person concerned by registered post on 26 September 2017, and again on 23 November 2017; no reply has been received to date. The person's request for Stamp 4 permission is a separate request and is under consideration. Further correspondence on this will issue shortly to the person concerned.

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.

Asylum Applications

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position with regard to the determination of permission to remain and eligibility for stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52525/17]

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

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

Under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international protection applicant. The offence is punishable by summary conviction to a Class A fine or a term of imprisonment of 12 months or both.

Deportation Orders

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52526/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 20 June 2002. The Deputy might wish to note that persons subject of a Deportation Order are obliged to remove themselves from the State and to remain out of the State.

Representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, including all representations made around family reunification, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 09 November 2017. If, as is claimed, the relevant party is already outside the State, then clearly the presentation requirement referred to in the Deputy's Question does not apply. However, it would be very helpful if this position could be supported by documentary evidence so that the relevant INIS and Garda National Immigration Bureau records can be updated.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be

obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Deportation Orders

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reconsidered on humanitarian grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52527/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 05 December 2017, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them.

They were given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order, or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Deportation Orders

122. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times section 78 of the International Protection Act 2015 giving gardaí the power to access private property to effect deportation orders has been used by members of An Garda Síochána or immigration officers since the Act came into force. [52551/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The enforcement of deportation orders is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB).

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they are in contact with the GNIB on the matter and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Legislative Measures

123. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times section 81 of the International Protection Act 2015 has been used by An Garda Síochána or immigration officers to refuse entry or leave to land since the Act came into force. [52552/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that the above grounds under section 4(3) of the Immigration Act 2004 (as inserted by section 81(b) of the International Protection Act 2015) has not been invoked to date.

The provision was created as a response to strong evidence that persons who had prior legal residence or permission to enter another territory of the Common Travel Area (CTA) were entering the State and in many cases making applications for protection solely for the purpose of prolonging their stay in the CTA. The fact that it has yet to be invoked may indicate that it has been effective as a deterrent to this form of abuse of the protection system and the CTA.

This provision will remain in place to be utilised should it prove necessary to protect the integrity of the Common Travel Area and the international protection process.

Garda Operations

124. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual breakdown of the staffing commitment of An Garda Síochána and the immigration services to Operation Gull since 2008. [52553/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Dáil Question No. 225 of 5 December 2017.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána that it is not possible in the time available to provide the details requested by the Deputy beyond those supplied in my reply of 5 December 2017, and that efforts to do so would require the expenditure of a disproportionate and inordinate amount of Garda resources and time. However, the Garda National Immigration Bureau are examining what available information can be compiled and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Garda Operations

125. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual breakdown of the number and nationality of persons arrested or detained by An Garda Síochána or the immigration services as part of Operation Gull since 2008. [52554/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Dáil Question No. 225 of 5 December 2017.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána that it is not possible in the time available to provide the details requested by the Deputy beyond those supplied in my reply of 5 December 2017, and that efforts to do so would require the expenditure of a disproportionate and inordinate amount of Garda resources and time. However, the Garda National Immigration Bureau are examining what available information can be compiled and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Prisoner Data

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and nationality of persons detained in prisons here for breaches or suspected breaches of immigration regulations for each of the past five years. [52555/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy

that the information requested in relation to the number and nationality of persons detained in prison for immigration-deportation reasons in each of the past five years is set out in the following table.

Nationality	Yr 2017 to date	Yr 2016	Yr 2015	Yr 2014	Yr 2013	Yr 2012
Afghani- stan	14	22	13	17	14	13
Albanian	34	67	48	70	36	25
Algerian	7	10	3	6	4	4
American	3	4	4	2	6	4
Andoran	1	0	0	0	0	0
Angolan	0	0	0	0	0	2
Antillian	0	0	0	0	0	2
Argentin- ean	1	0	0	0	1	0
Armenian	0	1	0	0	0	0
Australian	0	0	0	0	0	1
Bangla- deshi	4	0	3	2	1	1
Belgian	0	2	0	0	0	0
Belizian	0	0	0	0	0	1
Belorus- sian	0	1	0	0	1	0
Beninese	0	0	0	0	1	0
Bolivian	2	3	2	2	3	11
Bosnian	1	0	0	0	0	0
Botswanan	1	0	0	0	0	1
Brazilian	32	41	22	16	23	39
Bulgarian	0	1	0	2	0	2
Burmese	1	0	0	0	0	0
Burundian	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cameroon	0	0	1	1	1	4
Canadian	2	4	1	1	0	1
Central African Republic	1	0	1	0	1	0
Chad	0	0	0	1	0	0
Chidden	0	1	0	0	0	0
Chilean	0	1	0	1	1	2
Chinese	23	27	38	58	34	32
Colombian	0	0	0	1	1	0
Congolese	0	1	5	8	10	6
Croatian	0	0	1	0	0	2
Czech	0	0	0	1	0	0
Danish	0	0	0	0	0	1

Nationality	Yr 2017 to date	Yr 2016	Yr 2015	Yr 2014	Yr 2013	Yr 2012
Dominican Republican	0	2	0	0	0	0
Dutch	0	0	0	1	1	0
Egyptian	4	6	5	2	2	2
El Salvadorian	0	1	0	0	0	0
Equatorial Guinean	0	0	0	1	0	0
Eritrean	0	0	1	2	2	1
Ethiopian	2	2	0	0	0	0
Finn	0	0	0	1	0	0
French	3	0	0	0	2	1
Gambian	1	2	1	0	0	0
Georgian	8	8	3	4	9	14
Ghanian	3	3	2	1	4	4
Greek	2	1	1	3	3	5
Guatamlan	0	0	0	0	0	1
Guyanana	0	1	0	0	0	1
Hondou-rian	0	1	0	0	1	1
Hungarian	0	1	0	0	0	1
Indian	8	2	0	3	1	4
Indonisian	0	0	0	0	1	0
Iranian	2	6	4	6	4	10
Iraqi	16	4	5	3	2	1
Israeli	0	0	0	0	1	1
Italian	2	3	1	3	3	4
Ivory Coast	0	0	1	0	0	0
Jamaican	1	0	0	0	1	0
Japanese	1	2	4	1	3	2
Jordanian	0	1	0	0	0	0
Kazakh- stan	0	0	0	0	0	1
Korean North	0	0	0	4	0	0
Korean South	0	1	0	1	1	0
Kosovon	0	1	1	1	2	1
Kuwaiti	1	3	0	1	0	0
Kyrghyz- stan	0	1	0	0	0	0
Latvian	2	5	2	0	2	1
Lebonese	0	0	0	1	0	0

Questions - Written Answers

Nationality	Yr 2017 to date	Yr 2016	Yr 2015	Yr 2014	Yr 2013	Yr 2012
Lesothean	0	0	1	0	0	0
Liberian	0	0	1	1	0	0
Libyan	0	2	0	1	2	0
Lithuanian	5	6	5	8	6	7
Macedonian	0	0	0	0	1	0
Madeiran	0	0	0	0	1	0
Malawian	1	3	22	4	4	5
Malaysian	6	2	1	4	7	5
Maltese	0	0	1	0	0	0
Mauritanian	0	4	3	2	2	4
Mauritius	4	1	2	3	3	2
Mexican	3	1	2	2	3	6
Moldovan	4	5	3	4	7	3
Mongolian	1	0	1	1	2	1
Moroccan	0	3	1	1	1	2
Mozambique	0	0	0	0	0	1
Namibian	0	0	0	1	0	0
Nepalese	0	1	0	1	0	1
New Zealand	1	0	0	0	0	0
Nicaraguan	0	0	0	0	1	0
Niger	0	0	0	3	1	0
Nigerian	15	19	17	26	25	24
Norwegian	0	0	2	3	0	1
Pakistani	36	25	24	27	21	24
Palestinian	0	0	2	1	0	2
Panamanian	1	1	0	0	0	0
Paraguayan	0	0	0	0	1	1
Peruvian	1	0	0	0	1	0
Philippino	1	2	1	0	0	0
Polish	0	2	2	10	9	5
Portuguese	0	0	1	0	1	1
Romanian	6	6	4	4	5	10
Russian	2	3	5	6	3	4
Sao Tome & Principe	0	0	0	0	0	1
Saudi	0	0	0	0	1	3
Senegese	0	0	0	1	0	0
Serbian	1	0	1	0	0	0

Nationality	Yr 2017 to date	Yr 2016	Yr 2015	Yr 2014	Yr 2013	Yr 2012
Sierra Leonean	0	2	0	1	1	1
Singaporese	0	0	4	0	0	1
Slovak	1	1	1	0	0	1
Slovenian	0	1	0	1	0	0
Somalian	7	21	8	12	11	4
South African	8	25	8	4	17	18
Spanish	0	2	2	2	3	3
Sri Lankan	1	0	0	1	0	1
Sudanese	0	6	5	5	4	5
Surinam	0	0	1	0	0	0
Swedish	2	0	1	0	1	0
Swiss	0	0	0	0	1	0
Syrian	5	4	3	2	1	0
Taiwanese	1	0	0	1	8	2
Tanzanian	0	0	0	2	0	4
Togo	0	0	1	0	0	3
Tunisian	1	1	0	0	0	1
Turkish	1	1	0	0	0	1
Ugandan	0	1	0	1	0	3
Ukrainian	2	7	22	10	9	7
Unknown	6	1	0	2	10	1
Uruguayan	0	0	1	1	1	0
Venezuelan	0	0	0	3	9	3
Vietnamese	0	0	1	0	0	2
Yemenese	1	2	0	0	0	0
Zairian	0	0	0	0	0	1
Zambian	1	0	0	0	0	0
Zimbabwe	3	4	2	0	6	0
Total	311	408	335	390	374	385

Immigration Data

127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and nationality of persons detained here due to the fact that they have been deemed illegal immigrants, face deportation, are being transferred to another member state under the Dublin regulation or have been refused leave to land, with particular reference to the length and outcome of each detention since 2015. [52556/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In relation to information on the detention of persons refused leave to land, section 5 of the Immigration Act 2003

(as amended by the International Protection Act 2015), contains the main provisions dealing with the removal from the State of persons refused leave to land. It specifies that a person to whom this section applies may be arrested by an immigration officer or a member of An Garda Síochána and detained in a prescribed place of detention for the purpose of facilitating their removal from the State, which must be as soon as is practicable.

The table summarises the numbers of persons refused leave to land since 2015. In the vast majority of cases persons are returned on the next available flight within a short period of time. Others are granted a temporary permission to enter the State usually on the condition they report to their nearest Garda station. Only a very small number are detained for longer periods, usually until a return flight is available. Accordingly, these figures should not be interpreted as indicating any significant period of detention.

Year	No. of refusals
2015	3,451
2016	3,951
2017 to 1/9 *	2,578

* The figure for 2017 is provisional and subject to change.

The enforcement of deportation orders and Dublin Regulation removal orders is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau. Accordingly, detention for the purpose of enforcement of such orders falls within the remit of the GNIB. I am advised by An Garda Síochána that the breakdown of data requested by the Deputy is not readily available, and that efforts to compile such information would require the expenditure of a disproportionate and inordinate amount of Garda resources and time. However, my officials are exploring this matter further with both An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service, and I will be in touch with the Deputy again in relation to this matter.

Regional Development Initiatives

128. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to establish an IDA taskforce in the midlands in order to improve job creation in the region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52441/17]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This Government is strongly committed to regional development and my Department and its agencies are working towards ambitious targets to ensure that employment and investment are evenly distributed across the country, including across the Midlands.

The Midlands Action Plan for Jobs remains a key policy tool for supporting employment in that area. The second progress report on the Midlands plan was published earlier this year and it showed that substantial progress has been made towards that goal. The region, for example, was the second fastest growing in the country in the year to Q2 2017 with numbers employed up 5% to 122,400. The unemployment rate in the region has also dropped to 8.3%, representing a reduction of 4.2% since Q1 2015. My Department and its enterprise agencies continue to work together to implement the Midlands Action Plan and I am confident that the employment situation will continue to improve in the coming year.

In terms of specific efforts to encourage multinational-driven employment in the region, IDA Ireland markets the four counties of Mullingar, Longford, Laois and Offaly together as part of the Midlands region. There are currently 30 multinational companies based in the Midlands,

employing 4,280 across all four counties. The Agency is determined to increase those numbers and it has appointed a dedicated Regional Manager to the region to further aid its efforts to grow investment in the wider area.

The IDA is also investing directly in property solutions for foreign direct investment in the Midlands and has received planning permission for one office building in Athlone, which should be ready for occupation in 2018. This is in addition to an advanced technology building which is now occupied by a pharmaceutical firm.

In addition, the Agency has undertaken a number of general initiatives in the Midlands region to encourage investment. This has included introducing indigenous companies to multinational firms so that Irish businesses are best placed to win new contracts and thereby ensure their long-term sustainability. The Agency has also launched a digital marketing campaign to market the Midlands Region to potential investors. The Agency regularly engages as well with the Chief Executives of the relevant Local Authorities to ensure that all parties are working together to help win new investment and jobs.

Departmental Agencies Data

129. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings Enterprise Ireland and the IDA have had with each of the EU27 in 2016 and to date in 2017; the value of imports and exports by each State in this regard, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52480/17]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland is working with client companies through a network of market and sector advisers from 10 offices located throughout the country and 33 international office across the globe. 12 of these offices are located within the EU27 and another 8 EU27 countries are serviced by an Enterprise Ireland office from a nearby location. Enterprise Ireland's Market Advisers across these locations regularly interact with relevant enterprise development stakeholders.

To support client companies with global ambition to grow and diversify their global footprint, Enterprise Ireland runs a programme of Trade Missions and Events. In the period 2016 to 2017 (year to date), Enterprise Ireland ran 25 Ministerial Trade Missions and Events to EU27 locations. These events give Enterprise Ireland clients, the opportunity to connect with existing and new customers, access key decision makers, increase sales in international markets and exchange ideas.

Enterprise Ireland regularly engages with EU27 enterprise development groups to exchange knowledge on enterprise policy. This ensures that Enterprise Ireland continues to provide a best in class offering to its clients and informs the development of the agency's strategy.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland is the national coordinator for Horizon 2020, the EU's programme for research and innovation and is part of the drive to create new growth and jobs in Europe. This see Enterprise Ireland engage on an ongoing basis with EU27 members part of Horizon 2020.

Insofar as IDA Ireland is concerned, they have offices across the globe, and in Europe these offices are located in London, Paris and Frankfurt. These offices cover a range of territories and sectors. Europe is IDA Ireland's second largest market accounting for 20% of investments won by the Agency since 2010. While the market is challenging, significant opportunities remain, particularly in the context of Brexit.

Building geographical diversity into IDA Ireland's portfolio is a key goal of the IDA's current five-year strategy 'Winning FDI' and through this strategy the Agency intends to grow its market share in Europe, consolidate on its improving performance in key growth markets and achieve higher business returns by targeting fast growing companies.

In the time available to my Department details on IDA EU27 engagements were not immediately available but will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as they are available.

As regards the level of trade between Ireland and EU27, a table showing the statistics for trade between Ireland and the EU27 MS is attached with the data drawn from the Central Statistics Office.

Ireland's Goods and Services Exports 2016

~	EU Member State	Goods EUR Million	ServicesEUR Mil- lion
1	Austria	369	842
2	Belgium	14,617	2,464
3	Bulgaria	80	101
4	Croatia	38	89
5	Cyprus	33	-120
6	Czech Republic	369	338
7	Denmark	615	1,350
8	Estonia	42	37
9	Finland	257	1,131
10	France	5,069	6,229
11	Germany	8,025	10,484
12	Greece	282	339
13	Hungary	297	*
14	Italy	2,415	5,677
15	Latvia	59	69
16	Lithuania	34	111
17	Luxembourg	67	2,998
18	Malta	44	115
19	Netherlands	5,895	4,314
20	Poland	1,371	1,075
21	Portugal	423	1,076
22	Romania	278	95
23	Slovakia	77	95
24	Slovenia	92	61
25	Spain	2,972	3,804
26	Sweden	789	2,743
27	UK	15,034	22,496

* Suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

Services for People with Disabilities

130. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a transport grant will be pro-

vided for a person (details supplied). [52335/17]

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 provision of transport to adults with a disability attending HSE-funded day services is not a core health service, and the HSE endeavours to ensure that all service users access public transport, including rural transport services, if possible. This is in keeping with the principle of mainstreaming with a clear focus on ensuring persons with a disability have access to the normal range of services and participate in community life as far as possible. In general, day service users are in receipt of disability allowance and are automatically entitled to the Free Travel Pass, so there should be no additional cost burden at an individual level.

However when all other options are exhausted, and a person cannot avail of a day service because they do not have transport to attend, some transport is provided by disability service providers on a case by case basis as resources allow. Service providers are continuously reviewing their transport arrangements to ensure that they are used as effectively and equitably as possible within available resources. This may result in the provision of a reduced quantum of service to the service user, and the HSE does its best to provide transport in certain cases without reducing services. Service providers continue to keep the matter of transport under review.

The HSE has committed to establishing a high level cross divisional working group this year to rationalise the provision of transport and to maximise equitable access and efficiencies. The HSE also intends to liaise with the National Transport Authority and disability service providers to explore ways in which the Authority's services could assist people with disabilities. The National Transport Authority has a total of 17 Transport co-ordinating units called Local Link which provide safe secure and reliable Public Transport services in local and rural areas of Ireland through a combination of scheduled Public Transport services and door to door services. The HSE plans to explore the opportunities these units may provide to people with disabilities to access day services and participate in the social, educational and economic life of their local communities. A Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme is currently operated by the Revenue Commissioners which 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.

As the remainder of the Deputy's relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Data

131. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of times section 12 of the Mental Health Act 2001 was invoked in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 by An Garda Síochána, by division, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52420/17]

132. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of times section 12 of the Mental Health Act 2001 was invoked in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in

2017 between the hours of 6 pm and 9 am; the number that occurred at the weekend and bank holidays by division, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52421/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 132 together.

The statutory remit of the Mental Health Commission is to promote, encourage and foster the establishment and maintenance of high standards and good practices in the delivery of mental health services and to take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of persons detained in approved centres under this Act. In line with this role, the Commission collects a range of data and much of this information is published in their Annual Report which is available on the Commission's website.

Section 12 of the Mental Health Act 2001 confers powers on the Gardaí and allows them to take persons they believe may be suffering from a mental disorder, within the meaning of the Act, into custody with a view to making an application to a registered medical practitioner for a recommendation that the person be involuntarily admitted to an approved centre. Upon arrival in the approved centre, a Consultant Psychiatrist has 24 hours to examine the person and determine if he/she is suffering from a mental disorder.

The breakdown of applications for involuntary admission in 2015 and 2016 on a national basis by type of applicant, including by the Garda under section 12 of the 2001 Act, is as follows:

2015

Form	Type	Total	%
1	Spouse, Civil Partner, Relative	831	47%
2	Authorised Officer	231	13%
3	GARDA SÍOCHÁNA	404	23%
4	Any Other Person	289	17%
TOTAL		1,755	100%

2016

Form	Type	Total	%
1	Spouse, Civil Partner, Relative	786	44%
2	Authorised Officer	242	13%
3	GARDA SÍOCHÁNA	455	25%
4	Any Other Person	325	18%
TOTAL		1,808	100%

As the Deputy will see from the above tables, the number of applications by Gardaí under section 12 has risen from 404 in 2015 to 455 in 2016, a rise from 23 to 25%. Regional breakdowns of the national figures are not routinely collated nor is a breakdown of timings during the day when the person was taken into custody.

Up to 5 December 2017, 426 applications had been made for involuntary admission by a member of An Garda Síochána, however, these figures have not yet been verified.

Community Care Provision

133. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52501/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Health Service Executive's (HSE's) report "*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion*", (2011) proposes a new model of support in the community by moving people from institutional settings to the community. The plan is being rolled out at a regional and local level and involves full consultation with stakeholders.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. In May 2016, 2725 people lived in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings. A congregated setting is defined as a residential setting where people live with ten or more people.

The HSE has established a subgroup, under '*Transforming Lives*', the Programme to implement the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Disability Services, which is developing an implementation plan for moving people from institutions. I welcome the fact that the needs of people moving from congregated settings will be fully taken into account during this process as the model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan.

Just under 2,500 people with a disability remain living in congregated settings. I want to emphasise that the appropriate supports and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres. The model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan (PCP). The PCP may change over time in line with an individual's needs and circumstances and the model of service delivery applicable at a particular time.

I am pleased to note that the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is providing funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) to provide suitable accommodation for people transitioning from institutions in 2017. CAS funding is also available to provide housing for people with disabilities in the community more generally that is not specifically targeted at deinstitutionalisation. HSE Managers at Community Health Organisation level engage with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to provide a letter of approval confirming that they are supportive of the application and this it is in line with national guidance for housing of people with disabilities. This demonstrates the joined up commitment of both Departments to support the de-congregation programme.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on "*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion*", I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[52331/17]

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

135. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52334/17]

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

136. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a medical appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52341/17]

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 Funding

137. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding provided to a group (details supplied) in 2016 and 2017; the reason a recent application for additional funding which would provide services not currently delivered by the HSE was refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52355/17]

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.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

138. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 301 of 29 November 2017, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the staff of most section 39 organisations had the same cuts imposed on them as their colleagues in the HSE; if he has made provision for increased funding for section 39 organisations in order to ensure the restoration of workers' pay and conditions in line with their colleagues in the public sector; if the HSE has made representations to his Department on the need for increased funding to cover expected pay and pension restoration for persons in these organisations in line with their public sector colleagues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52358/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As previously outlined, under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees and therefore, the HSE has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff.

Employees of Section 39 organisations are not public servants and are therefore not encompassed by the Public Service Stability Agreements. This means that they were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions. Section 39 organisations are not obliged to pass on any pay reductions to their staff members or to provide for any pay restoration that may be negotiated as part of these public service agreements. While it is understood that pay cuts were imposed on Section 39 employees, it is not clear that these cuts were applied in a universally consistent manner across all the Section 39 agencies. It is also important to recognise that this group of organisations within the health sector is just one element of a larger complex issue which could have significant cost implications for the Exchequer across the public services as a whole.

I can again confirm that it is a matter for Section 39 organisations to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of their employment relationship and within the overall funding available for the delivery of agreed services.

HSE Staff

139. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on whether a person (details supplied) has to submit orders online or not; the assistance that will be given to them to comply with this requirement; the number of other dispensing doctors that must submit orders online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52373/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

140. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52376/17]

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 Funding

141. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if extra funding for a charity (details supplied) will be allocated for an education officer and information officer which will enable it to provide services for families and persons living with dyspraxia/DCD; the reason for his recent decision to refuse funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52381/17]

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.

Narcolepsy Issues

142. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the status of the narcolepsy unit at St. James's Hospital, Dublin; the number of staff employed in the unit; the funding available

to the unit for 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52391/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work is under way on the setting up a Centre of Excellence for Narcolepsy based in St. James's Hospital for patients with all forms of narcolepsy in adults and in children transitioning from the paediatric services. Funding for the infrastructure, staffing and recruitment for this centre is being considered as part of the overall 2018 service plan process.

Vaccine Damage Compensation Scheme

143. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to those who were affected by side effects of the swine flu, H1N1, vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52392/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and the Department of Education and Skills, continue to work together to provide a wide range of services and supports for those who have received a diagnosis of narcolepsy following administration of the pandemic influenza vaccine. These include discretionary medical cards, reimbursement of expenses associated with diagnosis and treatment, home tuition and learning supports.

The HSE's Advocacy Unit acts as liaison with service and support providers and other Government Departments to facilitate access to required services. It is in regular contact with individuals affected and regularly meets with representatives of the SOUND. Regional co-ordinators have been appointed to assist individuals by providing advice, information and access to local services.

The *ex-gratia* health supports include clinical care pathways to ensure access to diagnosis and treatment, multi-disciplinary assessments led by clinical experts, counselling services for both the individuals and their families, discretionary medical cards for those who have been diagnosed have been provided to allow unlimited access to GP care and any prescribed medication, ex-gratia reimbursement of vouched expenses incurred in the process of diagnosis and treatment, including travel expenses for attending medical appointments; physiotherapy, occupational therapy assessments, dental assessments and dietary services all on a needs basis.

The development of a national service for patients with all forms of narcolepsy in adults, and in children transitioning from paediatric services, in St James Hospital is being prioritised. The HSE is currently in the process of preparing its 2018 National Service Plan and it is due to be finalised shortly.

In the interim, the HSE will continue to pay for access to services, such as dietician and psychology services, that would have been provided in the Centre of Excellence from private providers to so that none of the affected individuals miss out on receiving these supports.

HSE Staff Recruitment

144. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be appointed to University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52397/17]

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

Autism Support Services

145. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is nobody appointed within the HSE who can assess children for autism in counties Sligo and Leitrim (details supplied); if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that having children assessed for autism privately is not an option for the majority of parents due to the cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52398/17]

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.

Dental Services

146. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding dental care for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52401/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

147. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a medical appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52402/17]

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

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

Mental Health Services Funding

148. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the amount of €71.2 million in funding for mental health services was distributed in CHO 1 in 2017; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [52412/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Data

149. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels in child and adolescent mental health services, in tabular form; the way in which this compares to recommended levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52413/17]

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

Mental Health Services Data

150. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels in adult mental health services; the way in which this compares to recommended levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52414/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Provision

151. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if all of the appropriate home support services will be put in place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52416/17]

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

Health Services Staff

152. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be considered for ill health retirement based on the person's medical reports. [52417/17]

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

HSE Properties

153. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a former HSE clinic (details supplied); his views on a proposal for its alternative use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52427/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter, your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Administration

154. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for an MRI scan at Tullamore hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52442/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

155. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for an MRI scan at Tullamore hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52443/17]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

156. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when FreeStyle Libre will be available for persons with diabetes on the long-term illness scheme; the reason this treatment is not available on the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52444/17]

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

Departmental Strategies

157. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE and his Department have developed a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents (details

supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52478/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020, launched in October 2015, is the first nationally coordinated approach to address sexual health and well-being. It takes a life course approach, which is a key underpinning concept in the Healthy Ireland Framework under which the Strategy will be implemented. It acknowledges the importance of developing a healthy attitude to sexuality in young people and of building on that foundation for positive sexual health and well-being into adulthood and older age.

The publication of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 provided the opportunity to ensure that all efforts across the entire range of sexual health – from awareness, education, training, access, treatment and surveillance – are co-ordinated, evidence informed and based on best practice.

The National Sexual Health Strategy has been developed against a backdrop of a changing Ireland regarding sexual behaviour and sexuality in recent decades. This changing landscape is evident in legislation introduced in recent years, and more openness generally in attitudes and culture around sexuality and sexual health issues.

The strategy was developed based on three goals:

- Everyone in Ireland will receive comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual health education/information and will have access to appropriate prevention and promotion services;
- Equitable, accessible and high quality sexual health services, which are targeted and tailored to need, will be available to everyone; and
- Robust and high quality sexual health information will be generated to underpin policy, practice, service planning and strategic monitoring.

The strategy recognises the diversity of sexual identities. It supports all expressions of sexual identity through positive sexual health and well-being outcomes.

Governance structures for implementation of the National Sexual Health Strategy have been established. The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme is the national programme charged with developing and implementing a national strategy to, among other things, improve the effectiveness and impact of sexual health services and preventative work. The programme is responsible for developing and implementing an action plan for each year of the Strategy. A Clinical Lead for Sexual Health has also been appointed in the HSE.

The HSE has worked with the Department of Education Skills (DES) for several years to support the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Programme. In partnership with the DES, the HSE has developed RSE lesson plans for teachers; the TRUST resource for senior cycle RSE and the B4uDecide Resource for Junior Cycle RSE. Over 60% of schools use these resources, according to the Lifeskills Survey. The HSE also developed B4uDecide.ie, a website for 14-16 years olds with trustworthy information on relationships and sexual health. It includes videos, quizzes and polls that teachers use as part of their RSE classes. There are 80,000 visits to the website every year. The Programme also supports RSE in youth clubs and funds the REAL U – a very popular RSE resource developed by Foroige. Funding is also provided to the National Parents Council to provide RSE seminars to parents.

158. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the policy regarding building a community nursing home and the prevention of displacement of existing private providers that live in close proximity thereto (details supplied). [52479/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Government is committed to enhancing the quality of life of older people, maintaining their full potential, supporting them in their homes and communities, providing access to respite care and day care and, when required, providing access to appropriate quality long-term residential care.

Residential care in Ireland is provided through a mix of public, voluntary and private provision. It is worth highlighting that the net budget for long-term residential care in 2017 is €940m and the Nursing Homes Support Scheme will support over 23,000 people by the end of the year. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. A key principle of the Scheme is that applicants can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. The home must have availability and be able to cater for the applicant's particular needs.

Community Nursing Units like Ballinasloe are an essential part of our national infrastructure of nursing homes. They provide over 5,000 long stay residential care beds or approximately 20% of the total stock of nursing home beds nationally. Ballinasloe Community Nursing Unit is a purpose designed building. The centre has opened on a phased basis, initially with 25 residents. Earlier this year the Unit increased the maximum number of persons that can be accommodated to 50 residents.

The demand for residential services will continue to grow with changing demographics, and the associated complex needs of an ageing population. The recently published ESRI report on projections on demand for health care indicates that demand for long-term and intermediate care places in nursing homes and other settings will increase by 40-54% by 2030 from 29,000 in 2015.

National Maternity Hospital Status

159. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national maternity hospital on the St. Vincent's hospital campus; his plans for the final agreement to include a lien or a licence; the body with which such a lien or licence would be agreed; when he expects a final agreement to be reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52505/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the grant of planning permission for the new National Maternity Hospital on the St Vincent's University Hospital campus, the Design Team is continuing to work on the detailed design of the hospital and the preparation of tender documents. This development will of course represent the flagship project of the National Maternity Strategy and will constitute the largest single investment ever made in maternity services in Ireland.

Work is also continuing on the development of a legal framework which will protect the State's significant investment in the hospital. The Deputy will, I hope, appreciate that pending the finalisation of an agreement between all the stakeholders, it is premature for me to give any further information at this point.

Mental Health Services Provision

160. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for each HSE psychological service, by age and length of time on the list, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52506/17]

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

Health Services Staff

161. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for a podiatrist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52510/17]

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

Medical Card Delays

162. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in issuing a generic medical card to persons living in temporary emergency accommodation, such as at a facility (details supplied). [52513/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Since the centralisation of the administration of the medical card scheme in July 2011, the National Medical Card Unit in the HSE does not provide “generic or house” medical cards to organisations or establishments. Residents in emergency accommodation who have applied for a medical card are assessed by the HSE under the current medical card guidelines. Under the guidelines, the HSE assesses whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis.

A person who is in receipt of a medical card must register with a General practitioner. However, if they move temporarily from their official postal address, and are resident in a place not ordinarily served by their medical card GP, they will be regarded as a “temporary resident” and can avail of medical services with any GP registered to provide GMS services. If the cardholder intends to relocate to a new area for longer than three months and/or a permanent basis, they must submit a change of doctor request to the HSE.

Hospital Appointments Status

163. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52515/17]

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

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

Medical Card Applications

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52519/17]

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

165. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with community hospitals and other health advocacy groups (details supplied) in County Donegal to address ongoing concerns regarding community hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52545/17]

166. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a reduction of service delivery for the care of older persons in existing hospitals, in view of his statements on community hospitals in County Donegal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52546/17]

167. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if HIQA standards and compliance regulations (details supplied) as currently in operation will be maintained; the timeframe for a review of same; the timeframe for the subsequent notification to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52547/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 to 167, inclusive, together.

I would suggest that the Deputy arrange for a representative from one of the groups referred to contact my office to request a meeting and I will endeavour to facilitate the request. A meeting which had been arranged with one of the representative groups recently was cancelled.

The Deputy will be aware that since the announcement of the 5 year Capital Investment Programme for Community Nursing Units and following discussions with public representatives, Health Forum members and local community groups, local HSE management in CHO 1 agreed to review overall requirements for the area. I understand that a report has now been received by the HSE's Social Care Division and will be considered over the coming period. Any proposals for changes to the approved Capital Investment Programme for Community Nursing Units would have to be considered in the context of capital funding available to Health, potential revenue implications and compliance with the agreed capital approval process.

The National Quality Standards for residential Care Settings, developed by the Health Information and Quality Authority, set out what is expected in terms of the service provided to residents, with a focus on continuous development of safe and effective care. A revised set of

National Standards were approved in 2016 and there are no plans to review these at present. Also in 2016 the Minister for Health approved the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) (Amendment) Regulations 2016. The amendment regulations provide that by January 2022:

- Bedrooms must have an area available for each resident to a minimum of 7.4m² space (inclusive of bed, seating and personal storage facilities), and have a no more than 4 residents (other than a high dependency room where maximum allowed is 6);
- There will be a minimum of one accessible toilet in close proximity to every eight residents (not necessarily direct or en-suite access);
- Communal dining space will cater for all residents but not necessarily at a single sitting.

Hospitals Funding

168. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE community health care organisation, CHO, 1 has submitted information and an application for additional funding for community hospitals as part of the capital plan (details supplied) formation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52548/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Health capital funding was outlined in the recently published Public Service Estimates for 2018 and the HSE is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2018 - 2021.

The Government is also preparing a new 10 year National Investment Plan for the period 2018-2027, which is expected to be published by the end of the year alongside and in support of the forthcoming new National Planning Framework, to sustain national economic and social progress over the long term.

My Department has asked the HSE to reply directly to you in respect of community hospitals.

Hospitals Capital Programme

169. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the projects in County Donegal that will receive additional funding as a result of the mid-term review of the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52549/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Health capital funding was outlined in the recently published Public Service Estimates for 2018 and the HSE is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2018 - 2021.

The Government is also preparing a new 10 year National Investment Plan for the period 2018-2027, which is expected to be published by the end of the year alongside and in support of the forthcoming new National Planning Framework, to sustain national economic and social progress over the long term.

My Department has asked the HSE to reply directly to you in respect of capital projects in County Donegal.

Health Insurance Data

170. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which data are collected on the level of benefits covered by medical insurance policies; and the way in which this varies over time. [52558/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Insurance Authority (HIA) is the statutory regulator of the private health insurance market, one of whose principle functions is to maintain the register of health insurance contracts. The HIA monitors market developments to ensure that new products meet minimum benefit requirements. These requirements ensure that all consumers obtain an appropriate minimum level of health insurance cover regardless of what plan they purchase and that every plan available is inclusive of a minimum suite of benefits and procedures.

There are 313 health insurance products currently in the market, a significant decrease from the 343 plans available in July 2016. While each product has a specific set of benefits, over and above the minimum benefits, there are two main categories of plans – advanced (90% of the market) and non-advanced (10%). The HIA regularly publishes analysis of market developments, including the proportion of advanced to non-advanced plans, in reports available on their website *www.hia.ie*.

Suicide Prevention

171. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the services available and the way in which they are accessed for a person (details supplied) presenting as a suicide risk who cannot be seen by child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, due to budget constraints and cannot access adult services; the way in which their risk will be managed in the absence of such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52559/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Enquiries have been made with the HSE who have indicated that they are in contact with this person and their family and I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Deputy may be aware that the HSE provides advice on their website *http://www.your-mentalhealth.ie/supports-services/urgent-help.htm* for people who may have concerns regarding persons with suicidal tendencies. The HSE advises that where someone has such concerns, they should contact as quickly as they can their G.P., their local Emergency Department, HSE Mental Health Services or the Samaritans.

Mental Health Services Provision

172. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the publication of the roadmap for out-of-hours access to mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52579/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): With regard to the timeframe for the publication of the roadmap for out-of-hours access to mental health services, the HSE has provided the following information:

The HSE Mental Health Division assigned a Service Improvement Lead to progress the

improved out-of-hours access to mental health services initiative earlier this year. The HSE initially mapped the entire 114 Adult Mental Teams to determine the existing level of 7/7 service provision. The results of this exercise showed that there currently is approximately 60% coverage across the nine CHOs of 7/7 cover comprising of a combination of Assertive Outreach, Home-Based Treatment Teams and nurse-provided cover.

The HSE then estimated the level of resources required to provide a 7/7 service across the entire 114 teams which were identified as being approximately 50 Whole Time Equivalents.

As part of Programme for Government funding in 2017, approximately €4.5 million was sought and was granted for the staffing, facilities and non-staffing costs associated with the enhanced Service which will initially be for known Service Users. A consultation process with all nine CHOs then took place to agree staffing numbers and professions. This has now been completed and the HSE is currently in the process of recruiting the additional staff indicated. A more detailed model of care and set of KPIs to assess the value and impact of a 7/7 Service is also being developed which is expected will inform the development of 24/7 Mental Health Services including Crisis Intervention.

Given the recruitment timelines the HSE has indicated that it anticipates the additional staff to be in place by the end of Quarter 1 2018 with the enhanced 7/7 Services commencing from then.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

173. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the HSE to fund pre-exposure prophylaxis, PrEP, in view of the announcement on 1 December 2017 that the drug will become available for prescription from 4 December 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52586/17]

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

Fishing Licences

174. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to issue permits for the harvesting of cockles on the Backstrand in Tramore, County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52400/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Cockle (Fisheries Management and Conservation) (Tramore Bay) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 533 of 2007) prohibit commercial harvesting of cockles within the area. The area of Tramore Bay and the backstrand area have been designated for protection as both a Special Area of Conservation and a Special Protection Area for birds as part of Ireland's Natura 2000 network. Therefore, any proposal to introduce commercial cockle fishing in this area through a permitting system would need to be set out in a fisheries Natura plan, and such a plan would need to be appropriately assessed in order to identify the potential impacts of such fishing on the features of Natura 2000 sites in the area. The process governing the assessment and consideration of fisheries Natura plans is set out in the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Sea-fisheries) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 290 of 2013).

Prior to any harvesting being allowed in the proposed fishing area, the area would also need to be classified by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority for the production of cockles under food safety legislation.

I am not aware of any requests to develop a commercial fishery for cockles in this area at this time. I would encourage members of the fishing industry looking to explore the potential for a viable fishery in the area in question to bring their proposals to the South East Regional Inshore Fisheries Forum for discussion and consideration. Further information on the Inshore Forums can be found online at www.inshoreforums.ie.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

175. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52425/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2017 Transfer of Entitlement application to my Department seeking the transfer of entitlements by way of lease. My Department has been in direct contact with the person named in relation to an outstanding issue pertaining to this transfer. This issue is currently being finalised by my Department and when finalised it will facilitate any payments due under the Basic Payment Scheme issuing as soon as possible.

Fishing Industry Development

176. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a single boat payment to provide income support for sea fishermen related to their fishing boats. [52429/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme 2014-20 is the vehicle for financial supports to the seafood sector up to 2021 and is co-funded by the Exchequer and the European Union. The Programme delivers a wide range of supports for aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing through a suite of 15 schemes.

The EMFF Regulation (508/2014) does not provide any legal basis for a single boat payment or for any other form of income supports for operators in the sector. Rather, the EMFF allows aid for specific investment projects and for compensation for specific losses in certain instances.

While the Common Fisheries Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy are similar in having their respective regulations providing for development aid to the sectors, they differ in that for the seafood sector there is no equivalent to the agriculture direct payment Regulation (1307/2013).

Fishing Industry Data

177. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of sea fishermen; and the number of Irish-registered sea fishing boats in tabular form. [52430/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Seafood industry supports the economic viability of many coastal communities, directly generating or supporting approximately 11,000 jobs. This includes full and part time/casual employment in the fisheries, aquaculture, seafood processing and ancillary services sectors as provided by BIM and set out below.

-	Full time	Part time	Total
Total Fisheries	3924	1060	4984
aquaculture	693	1023	1716
processing	2200	660	2860
ancillary			1440
Total	6817	2743	11,000

From: <http://www.bim.ie/media/bim/content/publications/BIM,Strategy,2013-2017.pdf>.

Under the Cod Effort Management scheme, there are 107 vessels with track record authorised to fish in ICES area 7a (Irish Sea), under Council Regulation (EC) No. 1342/2008 as amended by Regulation (EU) 2016/2094 of 23 November 2016. This Department does not issue authorisations for under 10m vessels which may also fish in the Irish Sea. A further 20 vessels have been authorised to fish in the Irish sea under the New Entrants Scheme using Gill nets or nephrops fishing gear.

Flood Relief Schemes Eligibility

178. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if compensation will be provided to farmers in counties Laois and Offaly who have had their farms damaged in recent flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52449/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Arterial Drainage Acts of 1945 and 1995 provide the Office of Public Works with powers for drainage and improvement of agricultural land and the undertaking of localised flood defence schemes to reduce flood risk in urban areas. The Arterial Drainage Acts and SI 122 of 2010 Regulations also introduced OPW consent requirements for the creation and modification of watercourses, embankments, weirs and bridges. As such, any request for funding to assist in remedial works following flooding should be made to the Office of Public Works.

In part response to poor weather conditions, the European Commission agreed to my request for an increase in the advance payment of the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme as well as an increase in the advance payments under our Rural Development Programme. This means an increase from 50% to 70% in the rate for the BPS to those applicants whose applications were confirmed fully clear and an increase to 85% in the case of RDP schemes.

Issuing of these BPS advance payments commenced after the 15th October and balancing payments are issuing this week. Payments on RDP schemes are also ongoing and last week we paid out close to €100m on our main agri-environment schemes which follows significant payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, the Sheep Welfare Scheme and the Knowledge Transfer scheme. Overall, at this stage, over €1.1 billion has issued to Irish farmers in recent weeks. These payments will make a significant improvement to farmers' cashflow at this time of year.

Fodder Crisis

179. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he has put forward to the European agriculture Commissioner for funding to be provided under the crisis reserve fund to finance a fodder support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52503/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The crisis reserve was established with the intention of providing additional support for the agricultural sector where the sector is affected by major crises. The reserve is funded by applying a 1.3% deduction from farmers' direct payments (as part of the financial discipline mechanism), on amounts exceeding €2,000, and is accumulated at EU level. In accordance with CAP legislation, where the crisis reserve is not utilised within the year, the funding is reimbursed to farmers in the following year.

In June this year, my Department refunded €13.6m to 2016 eligible applicants, which had been deducted from the 2015 BPS payment under the financial discipline mechanism. In addition, the European Commission confirmed this week that it would reimburse €433 million to European farmers, with Irish farmers being reimbursed to the tune of €13.2 million before 16 October 2018.

Despite the agricultural sector experiencing severe market difficulties arising from the introduction of the Russian Federation Ban on EU agricultural products in September 2014 and subsequent market difficulties in 2015 and 2016, it has proven extremely difficult to mobilise the crisis reserve fund at EU level as was originally intended.

In the event that the crisis reserve fund was to be utilised to finance a fodder support scheme, it would mean that all or part of the 1.3% deducted from farmers' direct payments would not be refunded to farmers as is currently the case.

Fish Farming

180. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 367 of 14 November 2017, the full title and specific section of the legislation on which he is relying to withhold publication of the audit report on the organic status of the audited aquaculture sites operated by a company (details supplied). [52561/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department, as the Competent Authority, delegates the task of certifying and operating the inspection system to which organic operators producing, preparing, storing or importing produce from third countries are subject. This is in accordance with the governing EU regulations. Since 2005, the associated services and obligations of the Organic Control Bodies are formalised by service agreements between the Department and the Organic Control Bodies concerned.

Under the Service Agreement referred to, there is a confidentiality clause whereby the parties to the Service Agreement agree to hold confidential all information, documentation and other material received, provided or obtained arising from the aforementioned agreement. This confidentiality clause includes an undertaking not to disclose any such information to any third party.

In addition, in the case of this particular audit, my Department is in the process of formally responding to the Organic Control Body who conducted the audit. Accordingly I consider that this matter is part of the deliberative process and therefore not permissible for release.

Aquaculture Development

181. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 372 of 14 November 2017, his views on whether the location of the divisions and agencies he has listed within the seafood branch of his Department demonstrates the conflict of interest between the regulation of aquaculture and the development of aquaculture as operated by his Department; and his further views on whether this represents maladministration on the part of his Department. [52562/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department has five distinct Marine Divisions. These are the Sea Fisheries Administration Division, Sea Fisheries Policy & Management Division, Marine Programmes Division, Marine Engineering Division and the Aquaculture and Foreshore Management Division.

The Marine Agencies Governance Unit, located within the Sea Fisheries Policy & Management Division of my Department, is responsible for corporate governance oversight of the Marine Institute (MI), Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the independent Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board (ALAB). The oversight role of the Department in this respect is to ensure that each of the marine agencies is and remains compliant with the revised code of practice for the Governance of state bodies (2016).

The marine related policy functions which fall under the aegis of this Department are managed in accordance with relevant applicable legislation. Marine policy functions are located within a number of Divisions within the Department. Aquaculture policy is within the remit of the Marine Programmes Division, a separate Division to the Division that is responsible for corporate governance. Aquaculture licence applications are considered by the Aquaculture and Foreshore Management Division of the Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The legislation provides for a period of statutory and general public consultation in respect of every application. Decisions on applications are made following the fullest consideration of all environmental, technical, legislative and public interest aspects of each application. In addition, it is open to any member of the public to appeal the Minister's decision to the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB), an independent authority for the determination of appeals against decisions of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on aquaculture licence applications. A person aggrieved by a decision of the Minister on an aquaculture licence application, or by the revocation or amendment of an aquaculture licence, may make an appeal within one month of publication (in the case of a decision) or notification (in the case of revocation/amendment). The secretariat of the board is located in Kilminchy Court Dublin Road Portlaoise Co. Laois. Email: info@alab.ie

As referred to above, my Department operates a clear divisional based structure with five distinct Marine Divisions dealing with the various marine policy functions assigned to it. I am satisfied that the issue of any conflict of interest or maladministration therefore does not arise.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals

182. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 368 of 14 November 2017, his views on whether the Marine Institute acted appropriately in withholding relevant information from the oral hearing on the disease outbreak at a site (details supplied), in view of the role and purpose of the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board oral hearing; and his further views on whether the actions of the Marine

Institute represent further evidence of the need to release the institute from the control of his Department's seafood branch. [52563/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, procedures in respect of the making of submissions to the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board are set out in the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act. In the context of the Oral Hearing referred to by the Deputy, no requests were received by the Marine Institute from the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board in respect of disease outbreaks on aquaculture sites in the area and accordingly no submission was made to the Board in that regard. It should also be noted that the Marine Institute was not a party to the appeal in question.

My Department has five distinct Marine Divisions. These are the Sea Fisheries Administration Division, Sea Fisheries Policy & Management Division, Marine Programmes Division, Marine Engineering Division and the Aquaculture and Foreshore Management Division. The Marine Agencies Governance Unit, located within the Sea Fisheries Policy & Management Division of my Department, is responsible for corporate governance oversight of the Marine Institute, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the independent Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board. The oversight role of the Department in this respect is to ensure that each of the marine agencies is and remains compliant with the revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016).

Origin Green Programme

183. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 369 of 14 November 2017, the reason his Department accepts as a policy the self-certification by persons operating salmon farms regarding compliance with environmental regulations, in view of the fact that at the same time his Department is investigating licence breaches by a major salmon farm operator; and if this approach applies to all food producers involved in the Origin Green programme. [52564/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Origin Green, Ireland's national food sustainability programme, is an initiative of Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board. I indicated in my replies to the Deputy to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 369 of 14 November, 297 of 24 October and 424 of 26 September 2017 that companies participating in Origin Green are required to be compliant with all statutory requirements. I also indicated that all operational issues to do with this programme are a matter for that State Body. For further information on the programme and its operations, the Deputy is referred to the agreed Oireachtas contact address – info@BordBia.ie.

Sea Lice Controls

184. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the time-frame to review sea lice control protocols in view of the serious sea lice problems in Scotland and elsewhere. [52565/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, in Ireland the control of sea lice is managed by the Marine Institute on behalf of the State. These protocols are more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

- The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.

- Data obtained as a result of inspection is published and made widely available.
- Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

The sea lice monitoring and control programme in Ireland has been acknowledged by the Environment Directorate (DG Environment) of the EU Commission as representing international best practice.

Ministerial Responsibilities

185. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if newspaper and print media are covered in his brief; if not, the Minister responsible for the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52366/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have no specific role in relation to the print media. The Press Council of Ireland and the Office of the Press Ombudsman were established by industry to safeguard and promote professional and ethical standards in Irish newspapers and magazines. These bodies have been formally recognised under s. 44 of the Defamation Act 2009, which falls under the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The only role that I have as Minister that includes print media is the administration of the media mergers regime, which was created as a result of amendments made to the Competition Act 2002 by the Competition & Consumer Protection Act 2014. All media mergers must be notified to me as Minister and I must make a determination whether or not the proposed media merger may proceed based on an assessment of its impact on the plurality of media in the State.

The examinations of all previous proposed media mergers conducted by my Department are available on my Department's website, as are a number of supplementary materials and a FAQ page concerning the media mergers process.

Broadband Service Provision

186. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the planned roll-out of fibre optic broadband will commence in areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52422/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that today over 67% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband and this is set to increase to 77% (1.8m premises) by the end of 2018 and to 90% (2.1m premises) by the end of 2020.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The Light BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of an Agreement signed with me in April.

The premises of the three constituents referenced by the Deputy are located in AMBER areas. High speed broadband will be brought to them under the NBP State Intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage. "Detailed Solutions" submitted by two bidders on 26th September are being evaluated by the NBP specialist team. The next stage in the procurement process is the receipt of final tenders followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

As part of this procurement process, the bidder(s) will be required to submit their strategies, including timescales, for the network build and rollout. My Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

I recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland and the frustration for communities, schools and businesses that do not currently have access to this level of connectivity. Delivering connectivity to the 542,000 premises (including approximately 16,500 in Waterford) that fall within the State led intervention under the NBP remains a Government priority and my Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Broadband Service Provision

187. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a company (details supplied) has met its commitments at the end of quarter 3 of 2017 on the roll-out of high speed broadband in rural areas; the number of premises served to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52468/17]

188. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises served under a contract with a company (details supplied) in which the service is provided by fibre to the premises, exchange of cabinet launched VDSL and other technologies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52469/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 and 188 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland via a combination of commercial investment and State Intervention. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecommunications sector so that to date over 1.5m or 67% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband. By 2020 it is expected that 90% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the rollout by the end of 2018. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website and can be viewed at:

<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/County%20Statistics.pdf>.

Following evaluation by officials from my Department of eir's Q3 update of its rural deployment of high speed broadband I can confirm that eir has met its Q3 target of 101,000 premises passed. As part of the Q3 update eir also informed officials from my Department that, as of September 2017, there are 14,287 connections to premises utilising Fibre to the Home technology.

Public Service Obligation Levy Increase

189. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the justification for the increase in the PSO on electricity bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52584/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Public Service Obligation (PSO) Levy is a charge on all electricity customers without exception, and is determined by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). The legal basis for the PSO and its method of calculation by the CRU are set out in Regulations made under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (S.I. 217 of 2002).

The levy has been in place since 2001, and consists of a set of support schemes designed to facilitate national electricity policy objectives for renewables, indigenous fuels and security of supply. Ireland has a target of increasing renewable electricity penetration to 40% by 2020 and the PSO has supported the connection of over 3,000 MW of renewable energy to the electricity grid and will continue to support the development of renewable energy so that we can meet our target. Moreover, international studies have shown that Ireland has had one of the lowest per unit supports for renewable energy in the European Union. The PSO currently represents around 10% of the average household final electricity bill, or approximately €7.69 on a monthly basis for domestic customers from October 2017.

The PSO levy is calculated on an annual basis by the CRU, which is an independent statutory body, solely accountable to a committee of the Oireachtas for the performance of its func-

tions.

I am very conscious of the impact of energy costs on industry and households alike. Customers can avail of discounts in the retail electricity market, either by contacting their supplier directly or by using the CRU accredited comparison websites, such as bonkers.ie or switcher.ie, to switch to discounted tariffs.

Rail Network

190. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional current and capital funding needed per the 2016 rail review report is accurate; his plans for future years in this regard (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52336/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Last year the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann published the Rail Review Report 2016 on which the NTA held a public consultation. Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA submitted a report of those submissions to my Department.

Since the Rail Review was published, there have been significant developments in relation to the level of funding available for rail investment and services. Budget 2017 allocated over €50m in additional funding to Irish Rail in 2017 bringing the total funding for the year to over €300m. This significant increase in funding allows for increasing investment in maintenance and renewal of the network and the rolling stock, and also to provide more funding for safety projects. In Budget 2018 I secured an 8% increase in the overall Exchequer funding for PSO services across both the bus and rail networks. That means that a total of over €285 million will be allocated in 2018 to support the delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable services. Budget 2018 also provided for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021 including an investment of over €400 million next year. This represents a 30% increase over the original Capital Plan allocations for 2018-2021 and includes investment of over €1 billion in heavy rail maintenance and infrastructure.

When I have reviewed the NTA's report on the consultation process, and when the NTA has updated it to reflect the increased funding that has since been made available for both current subvention and, in particular, the Capital Plan 2018 to 2021, I intend to bring the NTA's document to Government for consideration and would expect that it would be published shortly thereafter by the NTA.

Bus Éireann

191. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the management of Bus Éireann's assessment that the company needs an additional €30 million in current funding to maintain its service levels is correct. [52337/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The company recently indicated publicly that, since its foundation 30 years ago, it has accumulated total losses of €30m and that about half of this level was in the last two years. This differs from the detail outlined in the question.

As the Deputy is aware the company and its staff are currently implementing the Labour Court Recommendation that they accepted earlier this year, which is aimed at helping to return the company to a sustainable footing. I believe implementation of that Recommendation can provide for a successful and sustainable future for Bus Éireann.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

192. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the organisations in County Louth that applied for support under the recent capital sports grant programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52342/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all applications submitted under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are published on my Department’s website at:

<http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-applications-received>.

Road Projects

193. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of funding for the N62 Kilbeggan to Tullamore link road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52438/17]

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

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

Road Projects Status

194. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when his Department will provide funding for the inner relief road for Edenderry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52440/17]

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

As there are many competing demands, the appraisal and prioritisation of projects in line with the requirements of the public spending code and the Department’s capital appraisal framework is central to assessing which road improvement projects can be advanced taking available funding into account. In this context it is a matter for each local authority to prioritise projects within its area of responsibility and decide which projects will be put forward for consideration

by Department. No proposal has been received in relation to the Edenderry Inner Relief road.

Greenways Funding

195. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will authorise the use of moneys sanctioned for the development of the greenway from Galway to Clifden to purchase the necessary land along the route by agreement; if not, the reason this permission has not been given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52463/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department awarded €2m to Galway County Council in 2014 to deliver a Greenway from Galway to Moycullen. The funding agreement signed by Galway County Council does not preclude the purchase of land along the route by Galway County Council nor is it a requirement for the Council to seek the permission of my Department in relation to any arrangements which it considers necessary for the delivery of the Greenway, once it complies with the terms and conditions of the funding.

The delivery of the Greenway is the responsibility of Galway County Council and it does not require my permission to purchase land along the route by agreement, if the Council considers it necessary and appropriate to do so.

Road Projects

196. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for a survey of the motorway close to Shankill, Paulstown, County Kilkenny, in order to determine the works required to reduce the level of noise from passing motorway traffic at this location. [52476/17]

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

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

Sports Capital Programme Applications

197. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a reply will issue to correspondence received from a person (details supplied) regarding the sports grant allocation for County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52492/17]

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

The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and by that date a record number of applications were received. When the programme was launched, it was envisaged that €30m would be available which would have made the alloca-

tion 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, significant extra resources were secured to allocate under this round.

The allocations in respect of all local applications were announced on Thursday 30th November. Full details of these allocations are available on my Department's website as is the scoring system and assessment procedures used for assessing applications. In this regard, the total amount available to allocate was first divided by county on a per capita basis. If a county could not use all of its per capita funding, any surplus funding was also redistributed to other counties on a per capita basis.

The exact amount allocated to each project was primarily based on the assessment score and the amount sought with some minimal rounding and adjustments to make as many projects as possible viable. In relation to the distribution of funding within any particular county, it should be noted that every valid local application has been allocated some funding. The programme is open to every local sporting organisation in every county and my Department has no role in determining the organisations in any county that may submit applications. Variations in the geographic and sporting distribution of funding within each county are to be expected.

In the case of County Louth, it should be noted that a total €1.6m was allocated to 42 projects with at least 8 of these being in the immediate Drogheda region.

Sports Capital Programme Expenditure

198. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the value of payments drawn down by an organisation (details supplied); and when the final payment is due to be made to the organisation. [52508/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Funding of €30m for the redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh was announced in Budget 2014.

My Department has already paid out €23.087 million in respect of the project. Further payments will be made shortly. In accordance with the standard terms and conditions of the Sports Capital Programme, at least 5% of the overall grant (€1.5m in this case) must be retained until the Department has received the completion certificate from the project technical advisor. This is usually a year after the completion of the construction project.

Tourism Funding

199. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budget for tourism spending since 2011; the funding that has been provided to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52566/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The breakdown of the total Exchequer provision for tourism services, including Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, from my Department's vote, is available in the annual Revised Estimates Volume (REV) for Public Services, which is published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and available on that Department's website.

Tourism Promotion

200. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the strategy that has been put in place by the tourism agencies under his remit to promote Dublin in competition with other European cities as opposed to other regions; the budget that has been expended on tourism initiatives and tourism in Dublin generally since 2014, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52567/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the boards and management of the tourism agencies. 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.

Fáilte Ireland

201. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of Fáilte Ireland's development of a ten-year strategic plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52568/17]

203. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level to which Fáilte Ireland has engaged with stakeholders in the preparation on its ten-year strategic plan; the stakeholders that have been invited to make submissions and have made submissions respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52570/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 and 203 together.

Fáilte Ireland is required to operate within the legislative framework provided by Oireachtas Éireann and the policy framework set by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Certain corporate governance provisions are set out in the legislative and policy framework, including the production of periodic corporate publications (e.g. Annual Report and Accounts, Strategy Statement and others). The specific matter raised by the Deputy is an operational one for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the agency for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Data

202. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the locations from which tourists to Dublin predominantly come; the categories of tourists, such as business, leisure, sport, walking and so on that visit Dublin in terms of numbers and percentage of the total tourist make up, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52569/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, official statistics on tourism are published by the Central Statistics Office. Whilst the CSO does not currently publish statistics for overseas visitors on a county or regional basis, Fáilte Ireland uses CSO data to estimate regional figures for overseas visitors, including Dublin, which it publishes on an annual basis in its Tourism Facts release, which is available at www.failteireland.ie. This publication indicates that, in 2016, of the 5.687 million overseas visitors

to Dublin, 39% came from Mainland Europe, 33% from Britain, 21% from North America and 7% from elsewhere. The release does not detail the categories of overseas tourists visiting Dublin.

Question No. 203 answered with Question No. 201.

Tourism Data

204. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the markets and countries from which tourists visiting come from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52571/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The CSO publishes official statistics on tourism in Ireland. These statistics are published and available at www.cso.ie.

The CSO data shows that overseas visits to Ireland in 2016 grew by 10.9% compared to 2015. There were 9,584,400 overseas visits to Ireland during 2016, coming from the following markets:

- Visits from Mainland Europe grew by 8.5% in 2016, to 3,302,100 visits
- North America registered an increase of 19.4% for 2016 (1,808,000 visits)
- Visits from Great Britain were up by 10.6% for 2016 (3,924,100 visits)
- Visits from the rest of the world (mostly long-haul and developing markets) totalled 550,200 for 2016 (representing an increase of 2.2%).

Trips to Ireland for the first ten months of 2017 were up by 3.1% compared to the corresponding period in 2016. There were 8,531,500 overseas visits to Ireland during the ten-month period.

- Mainland Europe was up by 4.4% for the first ten months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 (3,016,700 visits).

- The number of visits from Britain for the first ten months of 2017 was down by -6.1% compared to the same period in 2016 (3,132,900 visits).

- The number of visits from North America was up by 16.4% for the first ten months of 2017 compared to the corresponding period in 2016, with a total of 1,845,200 visits.

- For Other (i.e. long-haul) markets, there was a 14.7% increase in visit numbers in the first ten months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 (536,600 visits).

More detailed information is available on the CSO website.

Driver Licence Data

205. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of licensed drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52572/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of current licensed drivers in Ireland on 30th November 2017 is 2,867,979.

Penalty Points System Data

206. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of licensed drivers who have zero penalty points as of 30 November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52573/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of current licensed drivers in Ireland on 30 November that have zero penalty points is 2,383,274.

Penalty Points System Data

207. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of licensed drivers who have between zero and three penalty points as of 30 November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52574/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of current licensed drivers in Ireland on 30 November 2017 that have between zero and three penalty points is 442,008.

Penalty Points System Data

208. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of licensed drivers who have between three and six penalty points as of 30 November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52575/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of current licensed drivers in Ireland on 30 November 2017 that have four, five or six penalty points is 88,394.

Penalty Points System Data

209. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of licensed drivers who have between six and nine penalty points as of 30 November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52576/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of current licensed drivers in Ireland on 30 November 2017 that have seven, eight or nine penalty points is 15,613.

Penalty Points System Data

210. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of licensed drivers who have ten or 11 penalty points as of 30 November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52577/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of licensed drivers in Ireland on 30 November 2017 that have ten or 11 penalty points is 2,257.

Penalty Points System Data

211. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of drivers who have had their licence revoked due to accumulating the maximum number of penalty points to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52578/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of licensed drivers that have accumulated the maximum number of penalty points in 2017 (up to 30 November) and have been disqualified is 1,033 of which 235 are Novice drivers.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

212. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the basis on which an application by a club (details supplied) for the sports capital grant was refused. [52590/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I can confirm that the organisation referred to by the Deputy applied for a grant under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme.

When the 2017 Programme was advertised my Department issued a guide to filling out the application form which set out the Department’s minimum requirements that applicants had to meet to be considered for funding.

While I do not think that it is appropriate to publish the specific reasons why individual applications were deemed invalid at this stage, applications were deemed invalid primarily for one or more of the following reasons:

- Title/Access requirements of the Sports Capital Programme not satisfied
- Evidence of own funding not provided in prescribed format
- Insufficient own funding.

All applicants have now been contacted with details of the outcome of the assessment of their application, including details of why applications were deemed invalid. Relevant organisations have also been informed that they may appeal these decisions if they believe that an error has been made in deeming their application invalid.

Early Childhood Care and Education

213. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the ECCE scheme can be extended in special circumstances for children with disabilities who are not ready to start school at five years of age and need a further year in preschool to develop intellectual and communication skills (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52405/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): For the programme year 2017/2018, parents may request an exemption from ECCE eligibility criteria under limited circumstances from my Department; specifically where a child is assessed as having a special/additional need. Applications for exemptions from ECCE eligibility criteria for 2017/2018, must be supported by a letter from a medical specialist (not a GP/PHN) specify-

ing the child's special/additional need and diagnosis and confirmation that they (the medical specialist) specifically recommends an extra year of preschool for the child.

Unfortunately there is insufficient information provided regarding the child referred to in the Deputy's question to provide a definitive response as to whether an over age exemption can be approved for the 2017/2018 programme year in this instance. I would urge that the family in question should engage with my Department on the matter who will be willing to assist to achieve the best outcome for all concerned.

My Department also offers the Access and Inclusion programme (AIM) which is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. The AIM Early Years Specialists will work with the parents (and guardians), Providers, Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) and others (as appropriate) to support the child's transition to primary school.

Parents, guardians and providers are advised to engage with the AIM process where a concern in relations to a child's transition to primary school is identified. More detailed information on AIM can be found at www.aim.gov.ie.

The Department of Education and Skill (DES) also provides for the education of children with special educational needs through a number of support mechanisms, depending on the child's assessed disability.

Decisions regarding the over-age exemption for children hoping to avail of ECCE in the 2018/2019 programme year have been deferred until further consultation with parents occurs. My Department is committed to giving parents appropriate notice regarding the decision that is ultimately made.

Child Protection

214. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of units operated by charities (details supplied); the number of permanent staff; the number of volunteers, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52320/17]

215. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of units operated by charities (details supplied) that have closed due to lack of funding from 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52321/17]

216. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to fund the re-opening of the Waterford unit operated by a charity that closed on 1 December 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52322/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 to 216, inclusive, together.

I can inform the Deputy that I have no function in relation to the charities to which she refers. I can also inform the Deputy that I have no role in the decision taken by the charity to close the Waterford Unit to which she refers. My understanding is that alternative arrangements have been made for children who accessed this service. At this point, I have no plans to fund the re-opening of the unit and have not received a request to do so. I understand that the national helpline service will continue to operate on a 24 hour basis and that the service to children in the Waterford area is not affected by the decision to close the unit. I hold the charity in question in high regard. The charity has met with my Department recently and outlined their vision for

the future of their services nationally and I expect the charity will be in contact with my Department further in 2018 when it has further developed its proposals.

Child and Family Agency Data

217. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in foster care without a social care worker. [52344/17]

218. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in relative care without a social care worker. [52345/17]

219. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in foster care without a link worker. [52346/17]

220. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in relative care without a link worker. [52347/17]

224. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that are in private foster care. [52351/17]

225. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that are in Tusla foster care. [52352/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 to 220, inclusive, 224 and 225 together.

Under the National Standards for Foster Care, all children living in foster care should be allocated a social worker.

Tusla has informed me that as of the end of September 2017, 95% of children in general foster care had an allocated a social worker, and 93% of children in relative foster care had an allocated social worker.

Tusla have assured me that a social worker is always allocated in the following circumstances:

- When children are in care less than 6 months.
- When children are preparing to leave care.

When children have a disability, a mental health issue or challenging behaviour.

- When children are unaccompanied and seeking asylum.
- When a child's placement is deemed to be unstable.

If a child has not been allocated a social worker, their needs are reviewed regularly by the principal social worker, and all urgent and emergency cases notified to Tusla are dealt with immediately.

As of the end of September 2017, the latest data available, there were 6,231 children in care. Of these, 5,354 children were in statutory Tusla foster care, and 375 children were in private foster care placements.

The National Standards also state that approved foster carers are supervised by a professionally qualified link social worker. This person ensures that foster carers have access to informa-

tion, advise and professional support necessary to enable them to provide high quality care.

At the end of the second quarter of 2017, the latest data available in relation to link social workers indicates that 2,513 approved general foster carers had an allocated link social worker and 294 were awaiting allocation. Data also indicates that 1,020 approved relative foster carers had an allocated link social worker, and 159 were awaiting allocation. There were 311 unapproved relative foster carers and 87% (271) of them had a child placed with them for longer than 12 weeks. Of these 271 unapproved relative foster carers, 70% (190) had an allocated link social worker.

Child and Family Agency Data

221. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average number of weeks that a social worker stays with Tusla. [52348/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been advised by Tusla that the average length of service of social workers in Tusla is 543 weeks i.e. 10.44 years. This figure is based on the length of service for each social worker from start date to present date and averaged by the number of social workers in the Agency which is 1,469.40 whole time equivalent (WTE) as at 31 October, 2017. It also includes service pre-agency establishment i.e. with the HSE, Children and Family Services.

This average figure of 543 weeks demonstrates the wealth of experience and long average service of social workers in Tusla.

Child and Family Agency Data

222. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the maximum number of cases that can be assigned to a social care worker by Tusla. [52349/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has advised that the allocation of cases to a social care worker is a matter for supervision by the line manager. No minimum or maximum numbers of cases are set down. The matter is reviewed on a monthly basis and is decided on the basis of the experience of the worker concerned and the presenting needs of the clients.

Child and Family Agency Data

223. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average number of cases that are assigned to a social care worker by Tusla. [52350/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has advised that social care workers within Tusla residential childcare services are typically assigned one key child at various times while social care workers in the community working in aftercare would typically work on up to 25 cases, depending on the complexity of the cases.

In terms of service provision in other community based services the average case loads for social care workers are quite varied as follows:

- Community Childcare Workers: 6-10 cases depending on intensity of work, number of

sessions and whether work is being done with the carers as this may be done in mornings when children at school. Play Therapists take on a maximum of two referrals alongside the above caseload. Caseloads are carefully monitored and managed by the Alternative Care Manager.

- Marte Meo Therapist: 6-8 families depending on number of visits and recordings needed.

- OARS Family Workers: OARS is an intensive family support service. Social care workers work in the family home three to four times a week for up to 14 hours per week. Two family assessments involving an intensive six week period working with families are carried out at any one time. Other intervention work is carried out where possible (1/2 families max). Social care workers work on a maximum of four cases at any one time.

- Ohana House: Ohana staff are based in the centre and provide support and supervision to families during access. The average caseload for an access worker is 10 cases.

- TOPS: TOPS work with young people on group based activities as well as individually tailored programs. The average caseload at present for an access worker is 9-10 cases.

Questions Nos. 224 and 225 answered with Question No. 217.

Child and Family Agency Data

226. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social workers who have ceased employment with Tusla in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by their given reasons for leaving. [52353/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has confirmed that the number of social workers who have ceased employment for each of the years 2014 to 2016 and for 2017 to 30/09/2017 is 471. This figure does not include retirements, death or permanent infirmity.

Social Work Leavers/Career break 01/01/2014 to 30/09/2017

Region	Year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Corporate		2	1	1	4
DML	19	28	39	33	119
DNE	39	38	48	33	158
South	15	17	31	24	87
West	21	33	23	26	103
Grand Total	94	118	142	117	471

The known reasons for leaving are varied and include going abroad; family and personal reasons; further training; and alternative employment opportunities.

Children in Care

227. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she will take to reduce the number of children in foster care who are subject to a voluntary care order as compared to a care order. [52354/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Voluntary care

is provided for under Section 4 of the Child Care Act, 1991 which sets out the means by which a child can be received into voluntary care by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. This allows Tusla to receive a child into care without a court order and with the consent of the child's parents when this is required for the child's welfare or protection. A voluntary care agreement may be appropriate in situations such as when a parent requires medical or other treatment for a time limited period. Social workers review a child in care's situation at statutory child in care reviews, in consultation with the child's parents and other professionals.

The decision to make an application for a care order from the Courts is a serious step and Tusla makes every effort to identify supports or actions that could act as an alternate approach.

It would not be appropriate for me to take steps to reduce the numbers of children being received in to the care of Tusla with the agreement of their parents.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

228. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to conduct an archaeological survey at the site of the former mother and baby home at St. Patrick's on the Navan Road, Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52393/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have no plans to conduct an archaeological survey at the site of the former mother and baby home at St Patrick's on the Navan Road, Dublin. As the Deputy may be aware, St Patrick's Mother and Baby Home is one of the institutions currently being investigated by the statutory Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters. As part of its terms of reference the Commission is directed to investigate and to make a report on burial arrangements in respect of persons who died while resident in these institutions. The Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 provides the Commission with significant powers in the conduct of its investigations. It is a matter for the independent Commission to determine the methodology and approach it employs in the course of its investigation.

Children in Care

229. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the recent statement by an organisation (details supplied) that vulnerable children are being left in neglectful homes until they are harmed due to the fact social workers are not using their powers properly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52490/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. The immediate safety of the child is the first consideration. Decisions made by social workers are taken with the best interests of the child in mind. This can involve balancing a complex range of factors.

Neglect is the most commonly occurring child protection issue, ahead of abuse and maltreatment. A distinction can be drawn between 'wilful' and 'circumstantial' neglect. For example, deliberately withholding food, shelter, seasonally appropriate clothing or social contact would be considered wilful neglect. Situations where parents or guardians are struggling to cope due to personal difficulties, stress or health issues may result in circumstantial neglect. Common categories of neglect include physical neglect, inadequate supervision or exposure to hazards, educational neglect, or exposure to drugs.

Upon receipt of an appropriate referral, the Duty Social Worker carries out preliminary enquiries, including checking to see if the case is already open or known to child protection services, clarifies the nature of the concern, contacts key professionals, e.g. public health nurses or teachers, and records the details of the child and family. In some cases the threshold for a child protection assessment or response is not met but a child has an unmet identified need. Tusla provides a continuum of care supports and interventions for ‘at risk’ children and their families, including early intervention and prevention services, family supports services and community based services such as Meitheal. It is commonly found that when family supports are provided, the situation improves.

While the child’s safety and welfare are the primary concern, removing a child from their home can be a traumatic and stressful experience. Social workers must at all times draw on their professional judgement and undertake a risk assessment to balance the safety of a child with the potential loss and trauma that may be caused by removing them from the family home.

Children in Care

230. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the recent statement by the chief executive of Tusla that supervision orders are not being used due to the fact the legislation is inadequate and does not give social workers sufficient powers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52491/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The spirit and philosophy underpinning the Child Care Act 1991 is that, where possible, families and children should be supported to enable the child be brought up within their family. A Supervision Order is a tool utilised to protect the welfare of a child without removing the child from the family home. It is less intrusive and in keeping with the constitutional imperative of minimalist intervention by the State in the life of the child within the family unit.

The criteria for the granting of a Supervision Order are less stringent than a Care Order. Section 19(1) of the Child Care Act 1991 requires only that the court be satisfied that there are *reasonable grounds* rather than establishing a *prima facie* case of harm.

Under a Supervision Order the parent retains exclusive parental authority. The Supervision Order allows the social worker to see the child in the home, however there is no authority to direct a parent to undertake parenting or other courses. In the event of present or imminent risk to the child, Tusla does not have the power under the Supervision Order to remove the child from the home. I understand that as part of the review of the Child Care Act 1991 Tusla will look for greater powers to be provided so that greater use can be made of Supervision Orders rather than Care Orders.

Youth Services Funding

231. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount received by each club and group under the local youth club equipment scheme 2017 by ETB in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52560/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I was pleased to approve the establishment the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017. The primary focus of this scheme was to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme allowed for the purchase of equipment

for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items. Some €6.35m has been made available nationally.

My Department is currently compiling a list of all grants awarded and I hope to be in a position to respond to the Deputy directly in the coming weeks.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

232. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the overage exemption has been removed from the ECCE scheme from September 2018; if her attention has been drawn to the negative impact that this change will have on children with disabilities; if she will respond to correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52587/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Yesterday I announced that I have paused a decision on this matter so that further consultation with parents will occur. This means that for now at least the overage exemption will continue to be available. Since ECCE was introduced in 2010, approximately 500 children availed of the exemption each year, although for reasons set out below, it is expected that much fewer than this would have applied in 2018. I hope that my decision of yesterday will bring the parents who planned to apply some relief and I encourage them to make sure their views are represented in the consultation that will occur over the coming months, the details of which I will publish shortly.

It is important that I set out the rationale for the original decision. The recent announcement of changes was designed to support the achievement of better outcomes for children with disabilities. No child would have lost out as a result of the overage exemption being removed.

Overage exemptions were introduced at the onset of the ECCE programme in 2010. At that time, the ECCE Programme only operated for a 38 week period, or one programme year. For some children with special/additional needs, attending preschool five days a week was not feasible and so an allowance was made to enable them split ECCE over 2 years, for example, a child may have availed of 3 days ECCE provision in year one and 2 days in year two. Their total ECCE provision remained at 38 weeks.

In order to facilitate this, in the cases where the child would have been over the age limit for ECCE (5 years and 6 months when finishing ECCE) an overage exemption was approved. This flexibility was never intended to conflict with the legislative requirement to start school by age six. The law and policy on school start-age is clearly established in Ireland. Children should be in school by the time they are six and the primary school system has a variety of resources to support children with disabilities. If children are not in school by six, under the Educational Welfare Act, the Educational Welfare service of Tusla must be satisfied that the child is receiving a minimum standard of education in a place other than a recognised school. (Tusla does this by sending Educational Welfare Inspectors out to the place of the child's education. Should this be required, this would be in addition to the Early Years Inspectorates funded by my Department.)

Since ECCE was first introduced, DCYA has worked to improve the pre-school experience for children with disabilities and to optimise their early development. The two main enhancements are:

- ECCE entitlement currently averages at 61 weeks, up from 38 weeks, and it will expand further to 76 weeks from September 2018. This is in keeping with good international practice.

- The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) has been introduced with 7 different levels of support for children with disabilities. Over 4,000 children have so far benefitted from targeted supports and many multiples of this from universal supports available under AIM.

Purely in the best interests of children, and for no other reason, a proposal was considered to remove the overage exemption to the upper age limit to the Programme. This was signalled last year, but in order to give longer notice to parents and providers, the planned introduction was delayed until September 2018. The motivation underpinning this development is entirely evidence based. Children with a disability benefit from early intervention, high quality early childhood care and education and high quality primary school education. In this regard my Department is complementing the work of the HSE's role in early intervention and the Department of Education and Skills's role in high quality primary school education by:

- expanding the ECCE programme so that all children have access to a full 76 weeks, double what was available in 2010.

- providing access to the comprehensive suite of resources under the Access and Inclusion model (AIM), introduced in September 2016.

The evidence is that children with a disability should start school with their peers once they have access to high quality and inclusive primary school education. The evidence is also that they should become teenagers with their peers and transition to secondary school with their peers.

This original decision to remove the overage exemption was made with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and in close collaboration with members of the AIM Cross-Sectoral Implementation Group, which includes representatives from the National Council for Special Education, the National Disability Authority, the HSE, a representative of parents of children with special needs and a representative of early years providers. There was broad agreement that, in light of the very significant developments and improvements to free pre-school education, both in terms of the two year duration of ECCE and the range of supports available, and the very significant supports that are in place for children in primary schools, the overage exemption would no longer support the overarching policy aim that children should transition to primary school with their peers. The decision acknowledged the supports provided by the relevant primary school, the National Council for Special Education and other bodies as required.

Notwithstanding the strong evidence base underpinning this proposal as being in the best interests of the children concerned, and the significant enhancements to the ECCE scheme in terms of two years duration and access to AIM supports; measures which effectively address the reasons for introducing the overage exemptions in the first place, I am also conscious of the need to listen further to those with concerns. To this end, as stated above, I intend to pause the proposed change and consult more widely with parents of children with disabilities.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

233. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to provide specific funding to local authorities for the local improvement scheme in the road works programme for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52581/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department wrote to Local Authorities last August to establish the level of demand for a local improvement scheme this year. This is a nation-wide scheme which The Local Authorities were advised that any requests for funds would be subject to their capacity to complete any proposed

works in 2017, and funding availability.

On 21st September last, I announced the provision of €10 million for a Local Improvement Scheme to support improvement works on private and non-public roads.

Based on demand for the scheme and the capacity of Local Authorities to complete works before the end of the year, I announced an additional €7.4 million for LIS roads at the end of November which has now been allocated to Local Authorities. There has been significant progress on the scheme, with registered expenditure of €14.1 million to date.

I recognise that there is an underlying demand for further LIS funding, as no dedicated funding stream has been available for these type of works for a number of years. I have therefore secured a further allocation of €10 million for LIS in my Department's Estimate for 2018. Allocations for 2018 are provisional and subject to the publication of the Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services.

Details of the 2018 scheme will be announced early in the New Year.

Mountain Rescue Service

234. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the support being given by his Department to mountain rescue; if this work is being co-ordinated through Comhairle na Tuaithe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52371/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Mountain Rescue Ireland (MRI) operates on a voluntary basis, but has received State support for a number of years from various Government Departments to help with the organisation's operating costs. I understand that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport currently provides an average grant of approximately €7,400 per annum for each individual MRI rescue team, and a grant to Mountain Rescue Ireland as the coordinating body for these teams. This grant helps with the provision of health and safety equipment, etc.

Support was provided to MRI in 2016 by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs towards the insurance costs of the MRI rescue teams. I also provided assistance towards MRI's insurance costs this year. A sum of €66,245 was paid to MRI in 2016 for this purpose, while the amount provided in 2017 was €88,816. The funding was not coordinated through Comhairle na Tuaithe.

Earlier this year I announced a new initiative, under the 2017 CLÁR programme, to support voluntary first-response organisations that provide much-needed services in rural areas in a voluntary capacity, often under very difficult circumstances. Under this measure, and as part of a competitive process, €361,116 was allocated to MRI towards the provision of 6 first response vehicles.

I recognise the very important work which MRI teams carry out and the support service they provide in rural and remote areas. All funded interventions will provide critical local support to the State's emergency response systems, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

Departmental Budgets

235. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the capital allocated to his Department in the 2017 Estimate by subhead; the amount spent to

date by subhead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52374/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The total amount of capital funding allocated to my Department upon its creation was approximately €77 million. To the end of November, payments totalling €25.2 million have been made, as shown in the table below. It has been impressed upon Local Authorities the need to accelerate spending on their 2017 projects as a matter of urgency, and further significant recoupment requests have been received in my Department for processing.

In addition, €10 million has been allocated to the Local Authorities under the Local Improvement Scheme. I recently announced a further €7.4 million allocation to this scheme. It is a condition of this scheme that all works must be completed by the end of 2017.

Subhead	2017 Allocation	Spend to end November (€'000s)
Dormant Accounts	2	1.6
Western Development Commission	1	0
National Rural Development Schemes	11.4	3
LEADER	30*	12
Town & Village Regeneration	12	0
Rural Broadband	1	0
Local Improvement Schemes	10*	1.6
RAPID	3.8	3.3
Programme for Peace & Reconciliation	0.7	0.6
Library Development and Archive Service	2.7	1.2
Community Facilities Fund	2	2

*€10 million allocated from LEADER to Local Improvement Schemes.

Local Authority Funding

236. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the moneys paid to local authorities to date for work that is not already completed and suitable verification provided to his Department by county; the schemes this money relates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52375/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I interpret the Deputy's question as referring to schemes launched by my Department in 2017.

Earlier this year, I launch a number of schemes that provide support for the development of rural communities. These include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor/Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR Programme and the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS).

These schemes all include conditions which require works to have commenced and pro-

gressed before payments can be draw-down by Local Authorities.

In the case of the LIS, funding can be drawn down on certification by a Local Authority that 50% of their works have been completed and that all works will be fully completed by 31st December 2017. In addition to Local Authority certification and desk-based checks by my officials, my Department's Inspection Services have completed on-the-spot verification checks on LIS roads in a number of counties and were able to verify that works had been completed to the level certified. Further inspection and audit will be carried out in 2018 under the LIS, and other schemes.

In the case of the Outdoor Rural Recreation Infrastructure scheme, the Town and Village Renewal scheme and the CLÁR programme, Local Authorities are required to spend at least 20% of the total project cost before the first tranche payment of 50% of their allocation under the respective scheme can be drawn-down. The balance of funding will only be paid on full completion of the projects in question.

The release of the initial tranche of funding is also subject to satisfactory progress being demonstrated in respect of the 2016 schemes, where such funding was provided to the Local Authorities.

The table provided details the allocations made to each Local Authority under the schemes referred to above. It also shows the payments made to each Local Authority up to 6th December 2017, on the basis of the criteria outlined above having been met. I anticipate that further payments will be made before the end of the year.

It is important to note that apart from the LIS, the rural development schemes which were launched this year are expected to operate over a 12-15 month period. Therefore, it was always anticipated that a portion of the funds allocated would be drawn-down in 2018.

-	LIS 2017		Town and Village 2017	
County	Total allocation	Total draw-down 2017 to date	Total allocation	Total draw-down 2017 to date
Carlow	€440,460.00	€250,000.00	€884,487.84	€0.00
Cavan	€335,080.00	€335,080.00	€929,727.60	€0.00
Clare	€866,774.00	€866,774.00	€944,000.00	€0.00
Cork	€1,151,985.00	€941,777.24	€1,347,826.77	€0.00
Donegal	€3,384,000.00	€884,000.00	€1,159,000.00	€0.00
South Dublin	€0.00	€0.00	€20,000.00	€0.00
Fingal	€0.00	€0.00	€252,000.00	€12,000.00
Dun Laoghaire Rath-down	€0.00	€0.00	€80,000.00	€40,000.00
Galway	€1,368,651.00	€1,368,651.00	€1,004,231.00	€0.00
Kerry	€995,578.00	€980,225.97	€868,471.60	€99,440.00
Kildare	€0.00	€0.00	€416,403.20	€0.00
Kilkenny	€605,565.00	€598,079.00	€873,364.00	€0.00
Laois	€812,270.00	€756,789.91	€983,407.24	€0.00
Leitrim	€487,947.00	€487,947.00	€1,098,538.00	€0.00
Limerick	€411,000.00	€411,000.00	€1,087,943.00	€358,680.00
Longford	€302,443.00	€302,443.00	€637,400.00	€0.00
Louth	€250,000.00	€249,999.75	€775,726.16	€0.00
Mayo	€1,272,974.00	€1,272,974.00	€1,348,178.00	€82,000.00
Meath	€474,290.00	€470,870.00	€905,546.00	€0.00
Monaghan	€366,312.00	€349,040.00	€580,000.00	€290,000.00
Offaly	€676,155.00	€676,155.00	€300,000.00	€0.00
Roscommon	€421,258.00	€421,258.00	€575,508.00	€0.00

Sligo	€496,158.00	€281,997.48	€1,063,968.00	€0.00
Tipperary	€246,900.00	€244,329.00	€857,384.00	€0.00
Waterford	€718,689.00	€660,825.00	€625,800.00	€0.00
Westmeath	€516,324.00	€516,324.00	€596,000.00	€0.00
Wexford	€494,493.00	€494,493.00	€1,157,525.00	€0.00
Wicklow	€310,000.00	€310,000.00	€265,000.00	€0.00
Totals	€17,405,306.00	€14,131,032.35	€21,637,435.41	€882,120.00

-	CLÁR 2017		Rural Recreation 2017		Overall Totals 2017	
County	Total allocation	Total draw-down 2017 to date	Total allocation	Total draw-down 2017 to date	Total allocation	Total draw-down 2017 to date
Carlow	€178,760.00	€63,596.70	€32,500.00	€0.00	€1,536,207.84	€313,596.70
Cavan	€288,731.00	€250,438.60	€617,310.00	€0.00	€2,170,848.60	€585,518.60
Clare	€323,132.00	€160,469.76	€55,917.13	€0.00	€2,189,823.13	€1,027,243.76
Cork	€195,600.00	€0.00	€1,109,520.00	€0.00	€3,804,931.77	€941,777.24
Donegal	€70,590.00	€0.00	€66,200.00	€35,500.00	€4,679,790.00	€919,500.00
South Dublin	€0.00	€0.00	€780,000.00	€0.00	€800,000.00	€0.00
Fingal	€0.00	€0.00	€34,096.00	€13,096.00	€286,096.00	€25,096.00
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€80,000.00	€40,000.00
Galway	€519,792.16	€235,361.50	€43,500.00	€0.00	€2,936,174.16	€1,604,012.50
Kerry	€134,188.00	€0.00	€114,276.93	€0.00	€2,112,514.53	€1,079,665.97
Kildare	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00	€416,403.20	€0.00
Kilkenny	€161,932.00	€107,030.00	€36,610.00	€11,947.50	€1,677,471.00	€717,056.50
Laois	€51,395.00	€39,208.50	€51,860.00	€29,127.00	€1,898,932.24	€825,125.41
Leitrim	€457,551.59	€333,857.50	€1,050,153.00	€0.00	€3,094,189.59	€821,804.50
Limerick	€161,730.00	€160,925.17	€135,269.86	€130,296.00	€1,795,942.86	€1,060,901.17
Longford	€238,417.06	€97,001.00	€445,159.00	€175,000.00	€1,623,419.06	€574,444.00
Louth	€245,869.00	€31,379.13	€8,500.00	€4,250.00	€1,280,095.16	€285,628.88
Mayo	€628,230.00	€303,107.33	€1,125,429.75	€141,330.00	€4,374,811.75	€1,799,411.33
Meath	€104,000.00	€104,000.00	€52,000.00	€36,549.46	€1,535,836.00	€611,419.46
Monaghan	€536,783.73	€138,394.00	€84,800.00	€61,284.28	€1,567,895.73	€838,718.28
Offaly	€186,954.00	€185,664.80	€1,040,115.41	€0.00	€2,203,224.41	€861,819.80
Roscommon	€325,555.00	€192,346.00	€118,040.64	€69,270.00	€1,440,361.64	€682,874.00
Sligo	€274,650.00	€120,386.40	€970,275.00	€64,995.00	€2,805,051.00	€467,378.88
Tipperary	€191,258.00	€121,934.00	€33,200.00	€24,333.00	€1,328,742.00	€390,596.00
Waterford	€313,365.00	€215,108.13	€70,600.00	€0.00	€1,728,454.00	€875,933.13
Westmeath	€77,096.00	€30,000.00	€933,634.26	€149,310.00	€2,123,054.26	€695,634.00
Wexford	€0.00	€0.00	€351,250.00	€0.00	€2,003,268.00	€494,493.00
Wicklow	€33,300.00	€0.00	€25,266.00	€12,633.00	€633,566.00	€322,633.00
Totals	€5,698,879.54	€2,890,208.52	€9,385,482.98	€958,921.24	€54,127,103.93	€18,862,282.11

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

237. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the person who requested legal advice (details supplied); the basis of the request; the reason there was a different approach taken to Galway; if he will provide the legal opinion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52403/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I presume the Deputy is referring to the Lot basis used for delivery of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

The SICAP programme is implemented by 46 Programme Implementers in 51 geographic areas (known as Lots). These Lots were determined by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in 2014, prior to the commencement of the current programme, which comes to an end on 31 December this year.

In advance of the commencement of the procurement process for the new programme, SICAP 2018 - 2022, which will roll out from 1 January 2018, legal advice was sought by my Department, inter alia, in relation to the Lot delivery structure. Based on the legal advice received by the Department it was decided that the new programme should be tendered for on the basis of the existing Lot areas (as previously determined by the LCDCs). I can confirm that all Lot areas in the country were treated on the same basis.

As the Deputy is aware, Legal Advice is subject to privilege and it would not be appropriate, in the circumstances, to provide it to any third parties.

Rural Recreation Policy

238. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans for the development of rural recreation in 2018; the schemes he plans to expand; the new schemes being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52464/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Pillar 3 of the Action Plan for Rural Development makes a commitment to a series of actions to maximise Ireland's rural tourism and recreation potential in recognition of the contribution that tourism makes to the rural economy. Actions under this Pillar are implemented across a number of Government Departments and will support sustainable jobs through targeted tourism initiatives, promoting Activity Tourism, and developing and promoting our natural and built heritage, including in Gaeltacht areas.

My Department delivers a number of initiatives that support the management and development of recreational infrastructure and will continue to deliver these initiatives into 2018.

For example, my Department administers the Walks Scheme, under which landholders receive modest payments to maintain sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. A total of 39 trails are currently covered by the scheme, and the number of landholders receiving payments under the scheme stands at approximately 1,900. The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development include a commitment to double the number of walks on the Walks Scheme. In 2018, my officials will be examining ways in which this commitment can best be progressed.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. The scheme was implemented in 2016 and 2017 and has facilitated the development of greenways, blueways, walks and other trails across the country. This scheme will continue to support important local, regional and national projects in 2018.

In addition, my Department has entered into a strategic partnership arrangement with Coillte to ensure the long term maintenance and development of trails and other recreational infrastruc-

ture on Coillte lands, for public use.

Ministerial Meetings

239. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of meetings of Comhairle na Tuaithe held since 6 May 2016; the number of these meetings he attended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52465/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): A meeting of Comhairle na Tuaithe took place on 6th April 2016, prior to the appointment the current Government, and a further meeting was held on 30th November 2016. I was not in a position to attend the meeting on 30th November in my role as Minister for State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Since the establishment of Comhairle na Tuaithe in 2004 and the publishing of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy in 2006, there has been a significant growth in the number of people engaging in outdoor pursuits, across a wider range of activities than heretofore, in more remote and fragile environments, and through a variety of new formats such as adventure races. In this context, and to ensure that the countryside recreation sector can grow sustainably, it was considered appropriate for a review to be undertaken of Comhairle na Tuaithe's structures and approach.

A review process was overseen by the then Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in late 2016, and completed in early 2017. A workshop was also held in January 2017 with Comhairle members, to discuss the recommendations of the review process and possible next steps. I am currently considering the details of this review in the context of a wider focus on the development of rural recreation sector as part of my Department's work programme for next year.

Leader Programmes Funding

240. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount approved for projects by each local action group, LAG, under the present Leader programme; the amount expended to date by each LAG under the present Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52466/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual EU co-funded programme to support rural development. Ireland has an allocation of €250 million under the programme over the period 2014-2020, including both national and EU funding. The programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area.

Funding Agreements for the current LEADER programme were, for the most part, signed with the LAGs in the second half of 2016 and the programme effectively became operational from that date. There was no project expenditure on the new LEADER programme prior to 2017, although funding was provided to the LAGs to develop their Local Development Strategies and to prepare for the implementation phase of the programme.

As of 6 December 2017, 546 projects with a value of over €14.4 million have been approved for LEADER funding by the LAGs.

Appendix 1 provides details of these projects by each Local Action Group.

A further 402 projects requesting over €18 million in funding are at various stages in the approval process. This funding will be drawn down as projects start to incur expenditure and submit payment claims.

Appendix 2 details the overall expenditure incurred to date under the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme in each LAG area. The figure of €13.263 million includes expenditure on Preparatory Support, Administration (which includes Animation), and Project expenditure.

I am confident that progress now being made by the LAGs, along with the administrative changes which have been introduced following the LEADER Forum hosted earlier in the year, will result in a continued increase in project approvals and substantial payments being made under the LEADER programme over the coming months.

Appendix 1 PQ 52466

LEADER Projects Approved by each LAG at 6 December 2017

LAG Area	Number of Projects	Leader Grant Amount (€)
Carlow	11	810,556.71
Cavan	12	424,468.90
Clare	51	953,791.50
Cork North	1	149,997.94
Cork South	3	203,610.12
Cork West	3	139,990.45
Donegal	54	1,359,076.11
Dublin	13	178,252.47
Galway East	0	0
Galway West	0	0
Kerry	103	1,710,577.99
Kildare	0	0
Kilkenny	30	794,155.93
Laois	21	256,624.34
Leitrim	0	0
Limerick	8	321,090.50
Longford	5	20,476.57
Louth	19	220,775.09
Mayo	23	898,887.49
Meath	7	239,206.66
Monaghan	6	394,957.08
Offaly	41	741,527.33
Roscommon	9	242,291.61
Sligo	28	622,774.68
Tipperary	31	746,643.39
Waterford	22	1,733,223.18
Westmeath	21	280,434.93
Wexford	24	1,017,898.48
Wicklow	0	0

LAG Area	Number of Projects	Leader Grant Amount (€)
TOTAL	546	14,461,289.45

Appendix 2 – LEADER 2014-2020 Programme Expenditure 2015 to 6 December 2017

LAG	Total Payments (€)
Carlow LCDC	257,126.41
Cavan LCDC	359,010.81
Clare Local Development Company	706,949.63
Cork North LCDC	399,782.61
Cork South LCDC	299,524.94
Cork West LCDC	467,784.15
Donegal LCDC	786,308.78
Forum Connemara	283,732.96
Galway Rural Development Co.	389,893.27
Kerry LCDC	773,562.60
Kildare LCDC	192,781.38
Kilkenny LEADER Partnership	729,819.35
Laois LCDC	319,797.53
Leitrim LCDC	355,032.02
Limerick LCDC	609,622.20
Longford LCDC	291,673.73
Louth LCDC	374,142.12
Mayo LCDC	890,641.43
Meath LCDC	422,738.37
Monaghan LCDC	350,505.35
Offaly LCDC	531,255.07
Roscommon LCDC	422,603.92
Rural Dublin LCDC	305,791.19
Sligo LCDC	446,879.89
Tipperary LCDC	521,101.85
Waterford LCDC	504,997.85
Westmeath LCDC	398,299.32
Wexford LCDC	474,858.21
Wicklow LCDC	396,927.89
TOTALS	13,263,144.83

Local Improvement Scheme Expenditure

241. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of expenditure that has been incurred to date under the moneys sanctioned by him recently by each local authority on the local improvement scheme; the amount of funding including pre-funding paid to each local authority under the scheme; the latest date given to local authorities to have the work completed and appropriate certification made available to his Department in the case of pre-funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52467/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Last September, I announced the allocation of €10 million under the Local Improvement Scheme fol-

lowing consultation with Local Authorities on the level of demand for such a scheme this year. The Local Authorities were advised that any requests for funds would be subject to their capacity to complete any proposed works in 2017, and funding availability.

I announced a further allocation of €7.4 million at the end of November, based on the capacity of Local Authorities to complete further works by the end of the year.

The table below details the amount of funding allocated to each county for the LIS scheme and the amount drawn down to 6th December 2017.

In line with the scheme criteria, funding can be drawn down on certification by a Local Authority that 50% of their works have been completed and that all works will be fully completed by 31st December 2017. Local Authorities were asked to submit their certification to my Department by 1st December 2017 in relation to the second tranche of allocations, to facilitate the processing of payments.

To ensure that the LIS funding is utilised as planned, my officials are carrying out desk-based checks on the Local Authority returns. My Department's Inspection Services have also completed on-the-spot verification checks on LIS roads in a number of counties and were able to verify that works had been completed to the level certified. Further inspection and audit work on the LIS roads will be carried out in 2018.

LIS 2017

County	Total 2017 allocation	Total Drawdown 2017 to date
Carlow	€440,460.00	€250,000.00
Cavan	€335,080.00	€335,080.00
Clare	€866,774.00	€866,774.00
Cork	€1,151,985.00	€941,777.24
Donegal	€3,384,000.00	€884,000.00
Galway	€1,368,651.00	€1,368,651.00
Kerry	€995,578.00	€980,225.97
Kilkenny	€605,565.00	€598,079.00
Laois	€812,270.00	€756,789.91
Leitrim	€487,947.00	€487,947.00
Limerick	€411,000.00	€411,000.00
Longford	€302,443.00	€302,443.00
Louth	€250,000.00	€249,999.75
Mayo	€1,272,974.00	€1,272,974.00
Meath	€474,290.00	€470,870.00
Monaghan	€366,312.00	€349,040.00
Offaly	€676,155.00	€676,155.00
Roscommon	€421,258.00	€421,258.00
Sligo	€496,158.00	€281,997.48
Tipperary	€246,900.00	€244,329.00
Waterford	€718,689.00	€660,825.00
Westmeath	€516,324.00	€516,324.00
Wexford	€494,493.00	€494,493.00
Wicklow	€310,000.00	€310,000.00

County	Total 2017 allocation	Total Drawdown 2017 to date
Totals	€17,405,306	€14,131,032.35

Family Income Supplement Data

242. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of families receiving family income supplement by their numbers of children as at 31 December 2016 and 31 October 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52326/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The numbers of families in receipt of Family Income Supplement (FIS) in accordance with their respective family size for the requested dates are as follows;

Family Income Supplement

Family Size	Dec. 2016	Oct. 2017
1 Child	18733	18151
2 Children	19038	18851
3 Children	11888	12006
4 Children	5475	5610
5 Children	1704	1708
6 Children	475	491
7 Children	148	145
8 Children	69	64

Family Income Supplement Expenditure

243. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the family income supplement income limits by 5%, 10% and 15%, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52328/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated additional cost per year of increasing the Family Income Supplement (to be renamed the Working Family Payment) income limits by 5%, 10% and 15% respectively based on current numbers is as follows:-

Increase	Estimated Additional Cost Per Year
5%	€57m
10%	€114m
15%	€171m

Budget 2018 increased the income thresholds by €10 for families with up to three children. Any further changes to the FIS/WFP income thresholds would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Departmental Contracts

244. **Deputy Peadar Kirby** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if her attention has been drawn to the fact that persons employed by a company (details supplied) are refusing to talk to Deputies on matters concerning persons in cases in which persons have given personal authority to the company to discuss the issues with Deputies; and if she will direct the company to allow this representation in future. [52329/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My department contracts with a range of third parties for the purposes of transacting its business. These include, for example, my department's branch offices, the Local Employment Service (LES) companies as well as the JobPath service providers such as Seetec.

In the case of enquiries from public representatives, information on an individual client may be disclosed once it is established that the inquirer is a public representative and is acting on behalf of and with the client's consent. This process includes confirming the identity of the inquirer - this may require, for example, returning the call and/or consulting www.oireachtas.ie to confirm the details of any caller. It should be noted that PPSN details are not disclosed.

If the Deputy has a particular circumstance in mind where he feels that the above was not the case, he should provide the details and my officials will raise the matter with the contractor in question.

Community Services Programme

245. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 480 and 481 of 14 November 2017, if the treasurer of a company (details supplied) that her Department officials approached to establish a new entity to avail of the funding previously provided to an organisation under the community services programme was a member of the board of the organisation when Pobal and her Department removed funding from that organisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52343/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I can confirm that the current treasurer of Inishowen Development Partnership Limited was a member of Inishowen Tourism Society Limited at the time CSP funding was withdrawn for the Inishowen tourism service on 30th June 2017.

I am satisfied that the individual's role as treasurer of Inishowen Development Partnership Limited did not create any conflict in terms of the discussions between officials from my Department and representatives from that company to explore how CSP funding for the Inishowen tourism service can be restored.

The person concerned is not on the board of the newly established Explore Inishowen CLG which is completely independent and separate from Inishowen Development Partnership Limited.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

246. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision regarding an invalidity pension application will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52423/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The department received a claim for invalidity pension (IP) from the lady concerned on the 15 June 2017. Her claim for IP was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 01 August 2017 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her rights of review and appeal.

She requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of her request. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision. She was notified on 22 November 2017 of the outcome of the review and of her right to appeal the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

247. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who have applied for the humanitarian assistance scheme as a result of recent flooding in counties Laois and Offaly; the amount available under the scheme; the amount paid out to families in this area to date; the number of applications to be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52448/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department immediately activated the humanitarian assistance scheme, administered by the local Community Welfare Service (CWS), to assist householders in County Laois and Offaly affected by flooding following the recent severe weather conditions.

The purpose of the humanitarian assistance scheme is to prevent hardship by providing income-tested financial support to people whose homes are damaged from flooding and severe weather events and who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, replacement of household items and in some instances structural repair. In dealing with emergency events of this nature, the Department generally adopts a three stage approach as follows:

- Stage 1 is to provide emergency income support payments (including food, clothing and personal items) in the immediate aftermath of the event.
- Stage 2 generally involves the replacement of white goods, basic furniture items and other essential household items. It is not until the flood water abates and houses dry out that the full extent of the damage to homes becomes fully known.
- Stage 3 is to identify what longer term financial support or works are required. It could take some time before this stage of response commences. Works carried out can include plastering, dry-lining, relaying of floors, electrical re-wiring and painting.

Following the flooding in Laois and Offaly, officials have provided financial support to the 57 affected households who have engaged with the Department and payments are continuing to be processed in these cases including some under Stage 2. Latest figures show that €13,000 has been paid to these households. It is unclear at this time the level of funding that will be required to return homes to a habitable condition. However, it is expected that the value of payments under the scheme will increase as we continue to move into Stage 2 and Stage 3 supports. The scheme is demand led and there is a time-lag between the flooding event and actual claims for financial support.

The Government has not set a limit on the amount that can be paid to an individual household under this scheme. Levels of payment depend on the relative severity of damage experienced and the household's ability to meet these costs ensuring that the funding is appropriately targeted.

People seeking assistance under the humanitarian assistance scheme should contact their local Intreo Centre where CWS staff are available to offer assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

248. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that those who are self-employed prior to applying for and being awarded the carer's allowance receive no credited contributions while in receipt of this payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52495/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of credited contributions (credits) is to protect social insurance entitlements by bridging gaps in an employee's social insurance record, where they are not in a position to pay PRSI, such as for period of unemployment, illness or in receipt of certain payments, including carer's allowance.

In isolation, credits do not give entitlement to social insurance benefits. In combination with paid PRSI contributions, credits can assist employees qualifying for short-term schemes such as jobseeker's benefit. Credits may also enhance the level of benefit for long-term schemes such as the level of payment of State pension contributory (SPC), but only where the individual has already met the condition relating to the minimum number of paid contributions.

To qualify for credits an individual must satisfy entitlement to the credits scheme. While there are no self-employed credits, individuals who were previously employed can access the scheme in the same manner as other workers, subject to meeting the conditions of the scheme. In general credits can only be awarded where an individual has had a recent attachment to the workforce as an employee i.e. within the last 2 years. Therefore credits are not automatically awarded to all recipients of carer's allowance.

Individuals who are caring on a full-time basis, including those in receipt of carer's allowance may, however, qualify for the home-maker's scheme. The home-maker's scheme is designed to help home-makers and carers to protect their SPC entitlement, and applies to home-making periods since 6 April 1994. It applies to the self-employed on the same basis as it does to other workers.

The home-maker's scheme provides that years spent working in the home while caring on a full-time basis for a child up to 12 years of age or an incapacitated person age 12 or over will be disregarded in calculating a person's yearly average number of contributions for the purposes of determining the rate of their entitlement to SPC. In this way the home-maker's scheme ensures that an individual's entitlement to SPC is protected during periods spent caring.

Carer's Allowance Review

249. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a request for review of a decision to refuse carer's allowance in the case

of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52509/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance was received from the person concerned on 12 June 2017.

Carer's allowance is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

It is a condition for receipt of carer's allowance that the applicant's means are less than the statutory limit, which in this case is €272.60 per week and that the person being cared for must have such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence was insufficient to indicate that the requirement for full-time care and attention was satisfied. The application was also disallowed as her means were assessed at €403.43 weekly which exceeded the statutory limit.

The person concerned was notified on 26 October 2017 of this decision the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was requested on 9 November 2017 and the outcome of the review was that it was decided that the requirement for full-time care and attention was satisfied. However, although the review of her means resulted in a lower assessment of €401.61 weekly, her means were still found to exceed the statutory limit.

The person concerned was notified of this on 2 December 2017 and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

250. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for invalidity pension by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52516/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on the 22 November 2017. The claim will be processed as quickly as possible and the she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

251. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed in the context of notice to attend JobPath appointment; if their application for disability allowance can be approved; and

if she will make a statement on the matter. [52524/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 28 July 2017.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and she was notified in writing of this decision on 23 November 2017. The person was also notified of her right to a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

To date no additional information or request for a review, or an appeal has been received from this lady. On receipt of further medical evidence the disability allowance can be re-examined for this lady.

JobPath is an approach to employment activation which caters mainly for people who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) to assist them to secure and sustain full-time paid employment or self-employment. The Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection selects jobseekers on a random basis for referral to JobPath. This lady has been in receipt of a Job Seekers payment since June 2015 and was therefore randomly selected for referral. She has been engaging with Cenit, the JobPath provider in Maynooth since April 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

252. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the circumstances of a case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52528/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The customer concerned was in receipt of the Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Non Contributory Pension. Her case was selected for a routine review to ensure that she continued to meet the eligibility criteria. Part of this review involved investigation and interview by an inspector. In the course of this investigation, the customer advised the inspector that she was in a cohabiting relationship since August 2017 and signed a voluntary declaration to this effect. The customer was written to on 29th November 2017 to give her an opportunity to present any evidence to the deciding officer that she wished to be taken into account before a final decision is made on her case. Her response is awaited.

If the customer does not respond to this correspondence a final decision will be made on the case after 21 days and the customer advised accordingly. The customer will also be advised of her right of appeal in the event that she is unhappy with the deciding officer's decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Revised European Social Charter

253. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the State has not to date ratified Article 31 of the revised European Social Charter; if steps will now be taken to ratify Article 31 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52583/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland ratified the Revised European Social Charter on 4 November 2000. At that time Ireland accepted 92 of the 98 paragraphs of the Revised Charter. Three of those paragraphs not accepted by Ireland make up Article 31, which relates to the right to housing. Any reconsideration of Ireland's current position in relation to Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter would fall under the responsibility of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Social Welfare Benefits

254. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has given consideration to exempting persons in receipt of the household benefits package, fuel allowance and-or living alone allowance from having to pay PSO charges on their electricity bills; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52585/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Public Service Obligation (PSO) Levy is a charge on all electricity customers without exception, and is determined by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). The legal basis for the PSO and its method of calculation by the CRU are set out in Regulations made under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 (S.I. 217 of 2002).

Any exemption would have to be considered by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment as my Department has no policy remit in the setting of the PSO levy or exemptions from it.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Property Tax

255. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of local property tax which is to be assigned to roads by each local authority in tabular form. [52436/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local Property Tax (LPT) was introduced to provide an alternative, stable and sustainable funding base for the local authority sector, providing greater levels of connection between local revenue raising and associated expenditure decisions and making the taxation system less dependent on other taxes.

In accordance with Government decisions on local retention of LPT, certain local authorities with large property bases receive additional income from LPT compared to their baseline (minimum funding level). The Government decided that these local authorities would use this surplus funding in two ways, with a portion available for their own use and the remainder, if any, to fund certain services in the Housing and Roads areas. This process is known as self-funding.

As set out in the following table, 5 local authorities are required to use €16.4m of their LPT allocations to self-fund roads services in 2017.

LPT self-funding of roads services

Local Authority	2017 Self-funding of roads services €
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Cork County Council	340,082
Dublin City Council	5,780,600
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	3,497,531
Fingal County Council	3,914,446
South Dublin County Council	2,886,859
Total	16,419,518

It is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources. It should also be noted that LPT is just one source of income for local authorities, with commercial rates and other local charges, for example, providing significant funding for the sector along with grants from Government Departments and other bodies.

Responsibility for Local and Regional Roads transferred to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) in 2008. An arrangement between my Department and DTTAS provided that funding for such Roads would be channelled from the Local Government Fund to DTTAS. As per the Revised Estimates 2017, €333m is being transferred for this purpose this year. Responsibility for the allocation of Local and Regional Road Grants to local authorities is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Commercial Rates

256. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the revaluation Bill will come before the Houses of the Oireachtas. [52514/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I understand the Question refers to the General Scheme of a Rates Bill.

Commercial rates form an important element of the funding of all local authorities. However, the legislative basis for the levying of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century. Many of the provisions are outdated and not suitable for business trends in the modern era. My Department has developed legislative proposals to modernise and consolidate the legislation governing commercial rates. The main issues being addressed in the General Scheme include the consolidation of over 20 separate pieces of legislation dealing with commercial rates into a single enactment; improved enforcement powers for local authorities to collect rates; provisions to allow the local authority to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support national and local policy objectives; and provisions for temporary abatement for vacant premises.

In this regard, the Government approved the drafting of a Rates Bill on 11 April 2017. The General Scheme of the Bill is currently with the Attorney General's office for drafting.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

257. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the cold weather initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52434/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At last September's Housing Summit, I emphasised the need for all housing authorities to have sufficient capacity in emergency accommodation and to have appropriate facilities in place for

every person sleeping rough, on any night of the week.

I instructed the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, at that time, to set about ensuring the delivery of 200 additional permanent emergency beds by Christmas, in a range of new facilities across the city. 50 of the 200 permanent beds are now in place and the remaining 150 emergency beds will be brought into use over the coming days, with all being in place by mid-December.

As the weather becomes colder, my Department has also been working with local authorities to ensure that their Cold Weather Initiatives are in place. These arrangements ensure that additional temporary beds can be brought into use across a range of existing services and facilities for singles and couples, who need them during periods of cold weather.

In addition to the 200 new permanent beds that will be in place over the coming two weeks in Dublin, there are also more than 50 temporary beds in place, if required during the cold weather. In Cork, there are an additional 25 temporary beds in place, while in Galway an additional 34 temporary beds are in place. In Limerick, an additional 10 temporary beds are in place and in Waterford 9 additional temporary beds are also in place.

The long-term solution to the current homeless crisis is, clearly, to increase the supply of homes for those who need them. Under Rebuilding Ireland, 50,000 new social housing homes will be delivered over the period to 2021, supported by €6 billion in funding.

A key mechanism for dealing with homeless individuals is through the Housing First Programme, which supports homeless individuals move from emergency accommodation to independent living. 180 tenancies have been established under this Programme to date.

This programme is being prioritised and it is expected that a National Director of Housing First will be appointed shortly to drive the programme. This post will be critical in supporting those who sleep rough or reside in hostel accommodation to enter into independent living arrangements.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

258. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the supports available to assist a person who has a house which is vacant for seven years and wishes to renovate it and bring it up to the required standard in order that they can rent it out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52332/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant properties across Ireland. The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the local authority or an Approved Housing Body (AHB). This allows for the property owner to sign-up to a lease arrangement for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs, subject to a minimum of 10 years. The value of the repairs will then be offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease. Total funding of €140m will be made available up until 2021, providing for a total of 3,500 social houses over the lifetime of the scheme.

A property owner can either choose to arrange for a contractor to carry out the repairs

themselves, or the local authority or AHB can arrange this instead. Property owners will not be required to take on landlord responsibilities and the local authority or AHB will have on-going management and maintenance responsibilities in respect of the properties.

The local authority will determine the eligibility for the scheme, having regard to the location and the suitability of the property for social housing and also taking into consideration the extent of the repairs that may be required. The maximum costs of repairs allowable under this initiative is €40,000 and the property must be vacant for a period of not less than 12 months.

The operation of the RLS pilot nationally has facilitated an appraisal of the scheme as part of my on-going review of Rebuilding Ireland, with a view to enhancing the operation of the scheme and ensuring increased take up and delivery. This review is on-going and revised initiatives will be announced as they are finalised.

Property owners who wish to find out more about the Repair and Leasing Scheme should contact their local authority or go to <http://rebuildingireland.ie/repair-and-leasing-scheme/>.

Housing Data

259. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the 50 to 100 commenced housing projects referred to by him in the Dáil Éireann on 13 July 2017 during the Second Stage debate of the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2017; the location and proposed number of units of each housing project listed; the number of units completed at each site before the Bill was introduced in Dáil Éireann; the manner in which in the case of each housing project, the obligations under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 are proposed to be discharged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52377/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The figure of between 50 and 100 housing developments referred to in the Question was based on indications from housing provider representative organisations that they had received approximately 75 enquiries relating to further extensions of the duration of planning permissions of the type addressed in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2017.

While my Department collates some summary data in relation to planning permissions at a local authority level and publishes this on the Department's website, the detailed information sought in respect of such developments is not available in my Department.

Building Control Management System

260. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of for completion certificates registered with the building control management system by local authorities to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52378/17]

261. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of for opt out once off single homes registered with the building control management system by local authorities to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52379/17]

263. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of completion certificates logged for social housing developments (details

supplied) in each of the years 2014 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [52450/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 260, 261 and 263 together.

The issues referred to are a matter for local Building Control Authorities, who are independent in the use of their statutory powers under the Building Control Acts 1990 - 2014.

Building Control Authorities are required to keep certain information pertaining to building works that come under the Building Control Regulations 1997-2015 on a statutory register, including particulars in relation to Commencement Notices, Declarations of Intention to Opt Out of Statutory Certification and Certificates of Compliance on Completion.

The Building Control Management System (BCMS) provides a common platform for clear and consistent administration of building control matters across the local authority sector. The BCMS is an IT enabler, set up to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their separate responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990.

The BCMS is centrally hosted by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of the 31 Local Authorities and has enabled this information to be hosted on a central nationwide register, readily available and searchable at www.localgov.ie/en/link-type/bcms.

EU Regulations

262. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the enactment of the European Union (Licensing of Large-Scale Extraction of Peat) Regulations 2016; his views on a legal case (details supplied), the outcome of which could cause negative implications on peat producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52435/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently progressing draft Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 that will establish a revised regulatory regime in respect of large-scale peat extraction, under the proposed title of the European Union (Licensing of Large-Scale Extraction of Peat) Regulations. Under the proposed new arrangements, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be required to carry out an environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of applications for a licence for peat extraction on sites of 30 hectares or more, with such activity to be consequently exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

The draft regulations have been the subject of focused stakeholder input from relevant Government Departments and State bodies, industry representatives and environmental groups. A detailed review of the draft Regulations is ongoing in light of these consultations and follow-up engagement with the EPA, with a view to finalising the Regulations for signature as soon as possible.

As regards the court case referred to in the Question, I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 254 on yesterday's Order Paper.

Question No. 263 answered with Question No. 260.

Departmental Data

264. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the difference between the figures provided to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government in late March 2017 (details supplied) and those currently listed on his Department's website statistic section. [52451/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Data collection and validation in relation to Part V output for 2016 had not been completed by March 2017 and, accordingly, any such data available at that point would have been provisional/incomplete. The final data were placed on my Department's website later in the year.

Vacant Properties

265. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria by which a housing unit is deemed to be a void unit for the purposes of the National Oversight and Audit Commission. [52452/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) is independent of the Department in the performance of its functions and I am therefore not in a position to comment on specific aspects of its work. However, NOAC may be contacted directly at info@noac.ie.

Vacant Properties

266. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria by which a housing unit is deemed to be a void unit that has been returned for the purposes of the figures provided by his Department on same. [52453/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Vacant social houses, categorised as voids, are those in need of far greater levels of repair than normal re-letting works, to bring them up to a suitable letting condition. They are vacant pending that work.

Strong funding support has been provided to all local authorities to remediate such vacant social housing so that the homes involved can be re-let as soon as possible. This exchequer funding is additional to funding that local authorities themselves provide in order to bring vacant properties back into use.

The works carried out focus not just on returning vacant social homes to use as quickly as possible, but also on remediation work bringing long-term benefits, including insulation retrofitting which means the house, when re-let, has high comfort levels and less heating costs for the incoming tenant. Since the introduction of the Voids Programme, almost €100m in exchequer funding has been made available to local authorities, with over 8,000 homes remediated since 2014.

As well as the above numbers of vacant social homes, there is a regular turnover of short-term vacancies in the social housing stock of local authorities, where a modest amount only of work is needed. In general, these vacancies are addressed by the local authorities from their own resources.

Motor Tax Yield

267. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount collected in motor tax receipts by each local authority in 2016 and to date in 2017. [52454/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Gross motor tax receipts for each licensing authority for 2016 and for January to November 2017 are set out in the following tables. The online receipts figures include vehicle licences and arrears. Motor tax office receipts figures incorporate vehicle licences, arrears, miscellaneous receipts, trade plates, and goods vehicles trailer licences.

January-November 2017

Licensing Authority	MTO Receipts (€)	Online Receipts (€)	Total (€)
Carlow	5,885,381	7,826,583	13,711,964
Cavan	5,229,132	10,209,386	15,438,518
Clare	8,827,384	16,471,740	25,299,124
Cork	27,242,666	85,321,239	112,563,905
Donegal	14,842,638	15,146,157	29,988,795
Dublin	37,943,900	203,062,707	241,006,607
Galway	16,650,359	36,030,088	52,680,447
Kerry	8,751,753	23,725,099	32,476,852
Kildare	9,548,024	36,445,424	45,993,448
Kilkenny	6,763,901	13,522,948	20,286,849
Laois	6,875,539	9,313,719	16,189,258
Leitrim	2,524,422	4,212,234	6,736,656
Limerick	13,025,503	26,622,614	39,648,117
Longford	3,634,275	4,648,961	8,283,236
Louth	8,274,994	14,137,628	22,412,622
Mayo	10,394,002	17,976,789	28,370,791
Meath	8,504,011	32,110,870	40,614,881
Monaghan	5,561,895	7,538,474	13,100,369
Offaly	5,860,669	9,959,426	15,820,095
Roscommon	6,678,550	8,046,035	14,724,585
Sligo	5,522,427	7,866,231	13,388,658
Tipperary	10,904,244	25,227,012	36,131,256
Waterford	8,186,670	16,224,243	24,410,913
Westmeath	8,182,025	10,482,220	18,664,245
Wexford	11,074,266	23,397,558	34,471,824
Wicklow	7,794,223	24,281,160	32,075,383
TOTAL	264,682,853	689,806,545	954,489,398

2016

Licensing Authority	MTO receipts (€)	Online receipts (€)	Total (€)
Carlow	6,814,097	8,290,941	15,105,038
Cavan	6,029,327	10,680,064	16,709,391
Clare	10,252,804	17,727,771	27,980,575

Licensing Authority	MTO receipts (€)	Online receipts (€)	Total (€)
Cork	32,682,181	91,748,508	124,430,689
Donegal	17,459,261	15,878,437	33,337,698
Dublin	45,426,953	221,450,439	266,877,392
Galway	19,990,309	38,457,921	58,448,230
Kerry	10,231,237	25,532,662	35,763,899
Kildare	11,389,716	39,174,306	50,564,022
Kilkenny	7,975,519	14,476,768	22,452,287
Laois	7,821,727	9,774,712	17,596,439
Leitrim	3,054,633	4,416,296	7,470,929
Limerick	15,149,511	28,653,379	43,802,890
Longford	4,280,575	4,849,878	9,130,453
Louth	9,911,461	14,991,338	24,902,799
Mayo	12,312,247	18,718,178	31,030,425
Meath	10,190,525	33,812,426	44,002,951
Monaghan	6,464,394	7,641,237	14,105,631
Offaly	6,907,040	10,419,900	17,326,940
Roscommon	7,403,707	8,536,460	15,940,167
Sligo	6,388,795	8,358,811	14,747,606
Tipperary	12,860,867	26,886,852	39,747,719
Waterford	9,442,251	17,359,263	26,801,514
Westmeath	9,741,470	11,016,293	20,757,763
Wexford	12,923,450	24,402,896	37,326,346
Wicklow	9,207,520	26,065,131	35,272,651
Total	312,311,577	739,320,867	1,051,632,444

Planning Guidelines

268. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the new section 28 guidelines for apartment developments will be published; his views on whether it was a mistake to announce the intention to change the guidelines so far in advance of their implementation; and if this has had an impact on the number of new planning applications for apartment development being lodged. [52455/17]

269. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department, or a body under its aegis, has undertaken research of the effect of changes to section 28 guidelines for apartment standards on planning permission applications for new developments; and if there is evidence that changes to the guidelines, such as those on minimum size standards introduced in December 2015 lead to a number of applications being withdrawn. [52456/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 268 and 269 together.

My Department is not aware of any significant withholding of applications or withdrawals as a result of the introduction of the Guidelines in 2015. The intention of the focussed review of the current Guidelines is to examine the scope for any further planning measures that could be deployed in relation to the viability of apartment development in our cities and towns, in the context of achieving more compact urban development.

I have therefore recently established a working group, whose role is to undertake a focused, time-bound review to ensure the maximum continuity of new apartment proposals coming forward for consideration, commensurate with the need to address technical aspects in need of adjustment in light of the practical experience in the application of existing 2015 Guidelines, with a view to encouraging greater supply. It has held several meetings to date and formed a number of sub-groups to examine specific elements in relation to apartment planning and building height policies.

The work of the group is scheduled to conclude in the coming weeks with the aim to update both the 2015 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities and the 2007 Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities, both of which are available at the following links:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/apartment_guidelines_21122015.pdf. www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Developmentand-Housing/Planning/NationalSpatialStrategy/FileDownload%2C14468%2Cen.pdf.

Planning Guidelines

270. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the minimum permitted size for a bedroom in terms of floor area, defined as the location in which a person or persons sleep, under statutory provisions; and the minimum permitted bedroom size for the private rented sector if different. [52457/17]

271. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the minimum permitted size for ceiling height for occupied dwellings, not just new dwellings; and the minimum permitted ceiling height for the private rented sector if different. [52458/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 and 271 together.

My Department's publication Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities (2007) for local authorities, sets out the principles and criteria that are important in the design of social housing, in order to facilitate the delivery of better homes, better neighbourhoods and better urban spaces. The guidelines provide appropriate guidance on space requirements and room sizes in both dwellings and apartments, having regard to the number of potential occupants, to facilitate the provision of good quality living environments for residents. It should be noted that these are guidelines not regulatory requirements and local authorities themselves have, in some cases, set minimum space requirements for houses within their local county/city development plans.

The apartment minimum sizes specified in the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities, published in December 2015, are mandatory for all local authorities. The sizes for 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments are not new standards but a restatement of the minimum apartment sizes for such apartments set out in previous statutory guidelines published in 2007.

In relation to floor to ceiling height, all new buildings and extensions or material alterations to existing buildings must comply with the legal minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations 1997 - 2017. Guidance on minimum floor to ceiling height of generally 2.4m is given in relation to ventilation. In addition, it is a specific planning policy requirement that ground level apartment floor to ceiling heights shall be a minimum of 2.7m. Applicants and their designers should consider the potential for increasing floor-to-ceiling heights where

practicable.

All landlords have a legal duty to ensure that their rented properties comply with certain minimum physical standards. These minimum standards are set out in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017. Whilst these regulations do not specify minimum room sizes or floor to ceiling heights, they specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, ventilation, natural light and safety of gas and electrical supply so that tenants are provided with safe, healthy and comfortable dwellings.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

272. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the outcome of the review of HAP rates and maximum rent levels undertaken in summer 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52470/17]

274. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has systematically collated data in order to understand the current barriers facing a single person household securing a tenancy in a one bedroomed apartment within the prescribed HAP limits for renting a property on the private rented market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52472/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 and 274 together.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. There are currently more than 30,000 households having their housing needs met via HAP and over 20,000 landlords and agents in receipt of HAP payments. HAP is a flexible and immediate form of social housing support that is available to all eligible households across the State. A summary of the household classes supported by the HAP scheme at the end of Q3 2017 is set out below, which indicates that single and single sharing households are able to access accommodation suitable to their needs in the private rented market via HAP:

- Single/ Single Sharing - 30%
- Couple/ Couple Sharing - 4%
- Lone Parent with Children - 40%
- Couple with Children - 26%

The increased rent limits introduced by this Government last year, together with the additional discretion available to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limit where necessary, are allowing HAP households to find suitable accommodation and willing landlords. Particular additional targeted supports are available to homeless households in the Dublin and Cork City regions to assist them in finding accommodation in the private rental market, with the support of HAP.

From available data, at the end of Q3 2017, approximately 20% of the total number of households being supported by HAP were benefiting from the additional flexibility that was provided to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limits. When the additional discretion available to homeless households in the Dublin Region is removed, 14.4% of households nationally were benefiting from the additional flexibility. In those cases, the average rate of discretionary payment being used was 14.9% above rent limits provided.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, recommended the introduction of a Rent Predictability Measure to moderate rent increases in those parts of the country where rents are highest and rising - where households have greatest difficulties in finding accommodation they can afford. The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provided for the Rent Predictability Measure and for areas, called Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), where rents can now only rise by a maximum of 4% annually for a period of three years.

This measure was implemented immediately in the four Dublin local authority areas and in Cork City as these areas already met the criteria for a Rent Pressure Zone in December 2016. A further 12 Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) were designated in January 2017, with the measure further extended to Maynooth and Cobh LEAs in March 2017 and to Drogheda and Greystones LEAs in September 2017.

My Department and I are constantly monitoring HAP data, as well as other key information relating to the private rental market. Indications are that the current HAP rent limits and the flexibility to exceed those rent limits provide local authorities with sufficient capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs. Increasing the HAP rent limits in particular local authority areas could have further inflationary effects on the private rented sector, which could have a detrimental impact on the wider rental market, including for those households who are not receiving HAP support. Based on the data outlined above, I am currently satisfied that the maximum rent limits, together with the additional flexibility available to local authorities, are generally sufficient to meet the demand of the rental market in these areas.

I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is currently operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department will, of course, continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Homelessness Strategy

273. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a statistical analysis has been carried out on the number of occasions adults are presenting to support organisations (details supplied); the number of these persons noted as accessing or needing wrap around services; the way in which this is recorded; the strategic planning undertaken to deal with identified growing demand; the department or organisation taking the lead on collating such data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52471/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities. For the purposes of funding under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 and the delivery and coordination of services, lead authorities are in place in nine regions countrywide. Housing authorities operate the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), which records details in relation to persons presenting to homeless services, and the various services that are provided to them.

In the Dublin Region, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) operates across the four housing authorities as a shared service, which includes the Central Placement Service. It is a matter for the relevant housing authorities and the DRHE to identify and liaise as necessary with other State agencies and NGO service providers on services and supports required. Such information and details are recorded by them on PASS and, given the confidential nature of this

information and data protection requirements, such information is not shared with my Department.

My Department's role with respect to Threshold is limited to providing funding for their research work. I understand that statistics on the number of households they engage with each year in relation to particular housing issues can be found in their annual reports which are available on their website.

With regard to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), my Department does not hold or collate the data referred to by the Deputy. The RTB was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Due to the quasi-judicial role of the RTB, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specifics of cases submitted to the RTB.

The RTB's customer service centre provides information to customers in relation to their rights and responsibilities, as well as information on their dispute resolution services. Further details on the numbers and types of calls received by the RTB can be obtained from the RTB Annual Reports at: www.rtb.ie/media-research/publications/annual-reports.

The Clerk of the Dáil has requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB has set up a dedicated email address for this purpose, at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie.

Question No. 274 answered with Question No. 272.

Housing Issues

275. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has undertaken to assess the inter-county movement barriers between counties assessed as being in tier 1, 2 and 3; the changes he plans to make; the collation of data that has been undertaken in his Department to assess the impact of previously implemented amendments to permit some inter-county changes within certain tiers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52473/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

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

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports has commenced. I would expect the results of this review to be available for publication in the middle of 2018. Among other objectives, this review is to consider the barriers that may exist by virtue of having three separate income bands and an assessment of the feasibility of introducing a formal transfer system that would allow social housing applicants move across county borders and income thresholds.

It is important to note that inter county movement is facilitated, to some degree, for those in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

The flexibility of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) as a social housing support is one of the scheme's key characteristics and was one of the primary benefits envisaged at the outset of the scheme. The new arrangements for movement between local authorities, introduced in April 2017, have increased equality of access by allowing households eligible for social housing support to avail of HAP in any local authority area, subject to the current Social Housing Eligibility Income Bands. Such flexibility removes administrative barriers and delays, better utilises all private rental stock for social housing purposes and provides for maximum activation potential of HAP households by removing geographical barriers to employment, such as loss of housing support or loss of time on a transfer list.

The following table provides details of the inter-authority movement since April (when the option was made available) to October 2017:

Summary of Inter-LA Movement (as at 24th Oct 2017)	
Intra Dublin	583
Dublin to other Local Authorities	55
All other inter-local authority movement	322
Total	960

Homeless Persons Supports

276. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress that has been made since 2014 to implement a fully functioning homeless persons unit in counties Kildare, Wicklow and Meath; the strategic planning that has been undertaken to deal with the identified demand for such a unit; the way in which the data is being collated; the other stakeholders involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52474/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and the day-to-day delivery of services for homeless persons, which the Deputy refers to are a matter for individual housing authorities.

It should be noted that homeless services are administered at regional level across the country and the counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow form the mid-east region. In each region a Joint Homelessness Consultative Forum exists, which includes representation from the relevant State and non-governmental organisations involved in the delivery of homeless services in the particular region. A statutory Management Group exists for each regional forum, comprised of representatives from the relevant housing authorities and the Health Service Executive, and it is the responsibility of the Management Group to consider issues around the need for homeless services and to plan for the implementation, funding and co-ordination of such services.

In relation to the collation of data, the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) is operated nationally in all State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. Housing authorities produce reports on homelessness on a monthly basis which are collated and published to my Department's website:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data.

Approved Housing Bodies

277. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and value of properties purchased by approved housing bodies on behalf of the State to address the housing crisis; and the value and quantity of same as of 1 December 2015, 2016 and 2017, by county, in tabular form. [52481/17]

280. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria balance and checks that an approved housing body must adhere to when buying a property at a public auction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52484/17]

281. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria balance and check that an approved housing body must adhere to when purchasing a property from an auctioneer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52485/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 277, 280 and 281 together.

There are two primary funding mechanisms provided by my Department to facilitate the purchase of properties for social housing purposes by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

Under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), funding of up to 100% of project costs may be advanced by local authorities to AHBs to provide accommodation for the elderly, homeless and people with disabilities.

My Department also provides financial support to AHBs in the form of a long term loan under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) to assist with the financing of the construction or acquisition of units that will be provided for social housing use. This loan facility can support up to 30% of the eligible capital cost of the project, where the units will be provided by the AHB under long-term lease arrangements (known as Payment and Availability Agreements and funded by the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP)) to local authorities for social housing use.

Both schemes are administered by local authorities, and funding advanced to AHBs is subsequently recouped from my Department in line with the terms and conditions of the relevant scheme.

Under both schemes, the demand for and suitability of the properties for social housing must be confirmed by the local authority. Where an AHB is seeking funding to assist them with the acquisition of properties under the CALF scheme an application for funding must be submitted to the Department. A financial evaluation is carried out by the Housing Agency on behalf of the Department prior to approving funding. Approvals also have regard to the acquisition price and submission of a market valuation for the property. It is important to note that under the CALF scheme, the loan is fully repayable by the AHB at the end of the term.

Regulation of the AHB sector is based on a Voluntary Regulation Code. The Housing Agency currently has responsibility, on an interim basis, for regulating AHBs. My Department is currently preparing legislation, the Housing (Regulation of Registered Housing Providers) Bill, which will put the current interim voluntary regulatory arrangements for the AHB sector on a statutory footing.

With regard to the number of units purchased by AHBs through schemes funded by my Department, information on delivery is published on the Department's website at the following

link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision.

Delivery statistics are collated on a quarterly/annual basis so it is not possible to provide tabular information specifically to the date requested, i.e. 1 December for each of the years indicated. The following table below provides information on an annual basis by local authority area for 2015, 2016 and to end Q2 2017. Delivery under these schemes for Q3 2017 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

-	CAS	CAS	CAS	CAS	CALF	CALF	CALF	CALF
Local Authority	No. of units Acquired 2015	No. of units acquired 2016	No. of units acquired Q1 2017	No. of units acquired Q2 2017	No. of units Acquired 2015	No. of units acquired 2016	No. of units acquired Q1 2017**	No. of units acquired Q2 2017**
Carlow	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cavan	0	20	0	0	0	12	0	0
Clare	6	0	0	8	1	1	0	0
Cork City	7	3	1	0	26	0	0	0
Cork County*	0	8	1	0	60	-5*	27	6
Donegal	0	5	0	1	5	2	6	0
Dublin City	18	21	16	0	47	0	5	2
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	1	28	19	0	10	47	4	6
Fingal	15	42	23	8	4	31	0	0
Galway City	0	14	0	2	30	15	0	0
Galway County	0	3	0	0	14	0	0	0
Kerry	7	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Kildare	8	34	48	13	0	49	6	37
Kilkenny	2	16	0	9	0	3	0	16
Laois	8	5	1	0	0	27	0	0
Leitrim	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	0
Limerick	13	20	17	0	0	5	0	0
Longford	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Louth	0	3	2	0	0	9	2	0
Mayo	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
Meath	0	8	10	0	0	0	0	0
Monaghan	14	1	0	0	13	0	0	0
Offaly	0	0	0	5	0	9	0	0
Roscommon	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Sligo	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0
South Dublin	5	15	3	3	82	14	0	1
Tipperary	1	1	6	0	0	0	0	0
Waterford	0	14	0	0	1	19	0	0
Westmeath	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wexford	2	3	1	0	28	35	0	0
Wicklow	2	5	4	0	0	0	0	0

-	CAS	CAS	CAS	CAS	CALF	CALF	CALF	CALF
Local Authority	No. of units Acquired 2015	No. of units acquired 2016	No. of units acquired Q1 2017	No. of units acquired Q2 2017	No. of units Acquired 2015	No. of units acquired 2016	No. of units acquired Q1 2017**	No. of units acquired Q2 2017**
TOTALS	112	277	152	57	331	283	50	68

(*The negative value arises as a result of a revision to previous years data which is

accounted for in the year of the revision rather than by amending past results. **2017 data is subject to reconciliation at year end.)

Funding for the CALF and CAS schemes is drawn down by AHBs from local authorities, and subsequently recouped by local authorities from my Department. Depending on factors such as phased delivery, stage payment, and the time-lag between delivery and finalisation of claims, unit delivery and the incurring of costs at Department level may not occur in the same year.

In addition to the acquisitions listed, the CAS and CALF programmes also support AHBs to deliver new build units for social housing. The full range of delivery supported under these schemes is published on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1a2-sh-2015-todate-brkdn-final_2017_v2.xlsx.

Total expenditure for the CAS and CALF schemes for AHB acquisition and build programmes over the period 2015-end Q2 2017 is set out in the following table.

Expenditure by year on full programme including Build and Acquisition schemes

Year	CAS Expenditure (to nearest €1m)	CALF Expenditure (to nearest €1m)
2015	€38m	€13m
2016	€37m	€35m
2017 (to end Q2)	€33.5m	€18m

I have made it very clear that I want to see a greater emphasis on direct building of social housing than was envisaged originally under Rebuilding Ireland. In 2018, we will see some 5,000 homes built, including 3,800 by local authorities and AHBs, and a strong pipeline is in place to assist in the delivery of these homes.

Since Q4 2016, my Department has also been publishing detailed quarterly updates on the status of all social housing build programmes, including the CAS and CALF schemes. The latest report, Q3 2017 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the link below and shows significant progress in the expansion of AHB Build activity, particularly under the CALF scheme.

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/housing-construction-report-q3/>.

Approved Housing Bodies

278. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of approved housing bodies; and the registered head quarters address of each.

[52482/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are currently 547 housing bodies with approved status. The register of AHBs, which contains the details of their registered headquarters, can be found on my Department's website at:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/voluntary-and-cooperative-housing/register-housing-bodies-approved-status.

Approved Housing Bodies

279. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding approved for the various housing bodies nationally as of 1 December 2015, 2016 and 2017. [52483/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are a range of funding and delivery mechanisms available to local authorities to deliver social housing supports in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies, i.e. through the Capital Assistance Scheme, the Capital Loans and Subsidy Scheme, the Communal Facilities Scheme, the Approved Housing Body Mortgage to Rent Scheme, the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme. The funding under these programmes is provided directly to local authorities, who in turn, advance the funding to approved housing bodies, as appropriate. It should be noted that CALF is a loan that is fully repayable with interest by the approved housing body.

The funding provided by my Department to local authorities in respect of the housing programmes listed above for the periods requested is set out in the following table. In order to match my Department's monthly accounting record of expenditure, the data provided is to the end of November for each year and includes amounts which were self-funded by certain local authorities from surplus Local Property Tax receipts.

2015 €m	2016€m	2017€m
101.36	118.74	195.83

Questions Nos. 280 and 281 answered with Question No. 277.

Approved Housing Bodies

282. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an audit has been carried out of approved housing bodies; the areas of assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52486/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Oversight of Approved Housing Bodies is currently conducted through a Voluntary Regulation Code (VRC), titled Building for the Future, A Voluntary Regulation Code for Approved Housing Bodies in Ireland, which was published by my Department in July 2013. The following year, the Department established an Interim Regulation Committee (IRC) to oversee the implementation of the voluntary code for the sector, supported by a Regulation Office, based in the Housing Agency. This arrangement is a prelude to the establishment of a statutory regulator to oversee the effective governance, financial management and performance of the sector. My Department is currently drafting the legislation to set up this new statutory regime.

To date, 249 AHBs have signed up to the code, which represents 95% of the estimated 30,000 housing units in the sector. The code sets out key governance, financial and performance management principles, with which all of AHBs that have signed up are required to comply.

The IRC and Regulation Office assesses AHBs in line with their size, scope of activity and risk profile, and conducts a regulatory assessment of each of the AHBs, based on the completed Annual Regulatory Return, Financial Statements and other information provided by the AHB. The Office issues Regulatory Assessment Reports to each of the AHBs, where appropriate. Notwithstanding the provisions of the voluntary code, the administration and financial management of AHBs is still a matter for their individual Boards and it is their responsibility to ensure that they meet their existing statutory obligations in regard to financial reporting matters.

Local Authority Housing Data

283. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of void county council stock in the past number of months (details supplied) with no occupancy, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52487/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Data in relation to the quantity of void local authority stock is not collected by my Department. Statistics on vacant stock for local authority social housing are, however, set out in the report of the National Oversight and Audit Commission on A Review of the Management and Maintenance of Local Authority Housing, published in May 2017, which is available at the following link:

<http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NOAC-Management-and-Maintenance.pdf>

Approved Housing Bodies

284. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria to become an approved housing body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52488/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Under Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992, housing authorities may provide assistance to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the provision and management of housing accommodation. Section 6 (6) of the Act empowers the Minister to grant approved status for this purpose.

Bodies which may be considered for approval are as follows:

- Limited Companies formed by guarantee of their members and not having a shareholding, registered under the Companies Acts, 1963 – 2001;
- Societies registered under the Industrial & Provident Societies Acts, 1893 – 1978; and
- Trusts incorporated under the Charities Acts.

The Bodies must also:

- Have, as their primary objectives, the relief of housing needs or poverty or hardship or the

welfare of Travellers, and the provision and management of housing;

- Have in their memorandum of association or registered rules, as the case may be, provisions prohibiting the distribution of any surplus, profit, bonus or dividend to members and requiring that the assets of the body be applied solely towards its objectives; and

- Ensure that their assets are applied solely towards their objectives.

Further details regarding applications for Approved Housing Body status can be found on my Department's website at:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/voluntary-and-cooperative-housing/approved-housing-bodies-AHBs>.

Approved Housing Bodies

285. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing bodies awaiting sign off. [52489/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are currently 10 applications with my Department, submitted by bodies seeking Approved Housing Body status in accordance with Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992.

Local Authority Housing Funding

286. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated to each of the Dublin local authorities for each of the past three years for refurbishing voids, purchasing properties, building new units and for HAP in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52504/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to funding provided to each of the Dublin local authorities for refurbishing voids, purchase of properties for social housing purposes and the construction of local authority social housing is provided in the following tables. The data includes amounts self-funded by the Dublin authorities from surplus Local Property Tax receipts.

In relation to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective HAP transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in their administrative areas but rather recoups all landlord cost via the HAP SSC. A breakdown of average HAP payments to landlords in each local authority area at 31 December 2016, and a breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP, in each local authority area for 2014, 2015 and 2016 and up to the end of Q3 for 2017, are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

2015

Local Authority	Refurbishing Voids - €m	Local Authority Ac- quisitions - €m	Local Authority Build - €m
Dublin City Council	11.64	25.79	3.61
Fingal County Council	1.62	31.71	1.45
South Dublin County Council	0.74	6.32	0
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	1.22	11.39	0.71

2016

Local Authority	Refurbishing Voids - €m	Local Authority Ac- quisitions - €m	Local Authority Build - €m
Dublin City Council	8.76	43.13	14.56
Fingal County Council	1.73	4	0.38
South Dublin County Council	0.7	13.12	1.32
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	0.18	5.44	4.36

2017 (to end November)

Local Authority	Refurbishing Voids - €m	Local Authority Ac- quisitions - €m	Local Authority Build - €m
Dublin City Council	7.38	34.42	29.44
Fingal County Council	0.32	13.39	12.79
South Dublin County Council	0.72	7.6	4.49
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	0.28	1.77	11.10

Homelessness Strategy

287. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline the degree to which he can directly, and through the aegis of the various local authorities in the greater Dublin area, address the homelessness issue and ensure persons sleeping rough become the responsibility of a single agency with the power to identify appropriate housing of a temporary nature at the earliest possible date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52529/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the Dublin Region, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive operates across the four housing authorities, as a shared service to coordinate on homeless issues from a housing authority perspective and to liaise with the other stakeholders and partner organisations. Furthermore, I recently established a new Homelessness Inter-Agency Group, chaired by a former Secretary

General, to examine how homeless services might be delivered in a more coherent and joined-up way across the various Government departments and agencies.

Government policy on homelessness recognises the provision of long-term secure housing, with support as needed to ensure sustainable tenancies, as the key solution to ending homelessness.

While all homeless people have a need for stable housing, homelessness is a complex issue and a variety of other supports and interventions can be required to meet individual needs. Indeed, many homeless persons, in particular those engaged in rough sleeping, have complex health and social care needs, including in relation to addiction and mental health issues, that require care and supports beyond the simple provision of accommodation via the housing authority. Consequently a multi-agency approach is considered necessary to successfully address rough sleeping. The work of the new Homeless Inter-Agency Group, which I established, will be key in supporting this approach.

Housing-led initiatives are critical in this regard, providing direct access to housing and to the intensive health, addiction and personal supports required for people who are homeless and have complex needs to maintain their tenancies. Arising from last September's Housing Summit, I indicated that a National Director of Housing First, with specialist expertise, would be appointed and that the housing first approach would be expanded beyond Dublin to the other main urban areas. The recruitment process for that position is now underway and the newly appointed Director of Housing First will be responsible for:

- coordinating and driving a national, cross-Government housing-led approach to homelessness;
- supporting regional and local delivery of housing-led approaches; and
- overseeing the achievement of the housing-led targets in Rebuilding Ireland.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

288. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline the extent to which the actual housing need can be determined by reference to the number of families currently on local authority housing lists in the greater Dublin area and the number of new applicants coming onto such lists arising from property repossessions by lenders, venture capital funds and third-party unregulated entities generally displacing families in rented accommodation; if steps will be taken to stem the flow by way of modular and rapid-build housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52530/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory summary of social housing assessments, which are now being carried out on an annual basis.

The most recently published statutory summary of social housing assessments relates to the assessment carried out in 2016. This records the number of households on all local authority waiting lists, as at 21 September 2016. The results show that there were 91,600 households deemed qualified for, and in need of social housing support. 39% of all households qualified for social housing support are in the four Dublin Housing Authorities, over half (56%) of whom are in the Dublin City Council area.

As the Deputy will be aware, under Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 50,000 new social housing homes will be delivered out to 2021 and an additional 80,000 new households will be supported under the Housing Assistance Payment scheme. These tenancies will support and meet the needs of households on waiting lists across the country, including Dublin.

My Department is encouraging the use of rapid build methodologies, including modular build, for accelerated delivery of social housing units generally. The question of utilising rapid build methodologies and other innovative construction technologies, including modular is, ultimately, a matter for consideration by each local authority and Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's) in the context of individual projects. Utilising innovative construction technologies can accelerate housing provision, as timeframes are considerably less than for traditional build.

In December last year, the Government introduced limits on rent increases in designated Rent Pressure Zones, those areas of the country where rents are highest and rising fastest. The measure was introduced to slow the increase in rents which is a significant driver of increasing homelessness. The coverage of the Rent Pressure Zones is substantial. Nearly 57% of all registered rental properties, involving approximately 180,000 tenancies, are currently in designated areas.

In addition, we will shortly introduce the requirement for landlords to notify the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) when issuing a notice terminating a tenancy. Where this happens, the RTB will contact the affected tenant and provide them with the relevant contacts for homelessness prevention services in their area.

My Department also funds tenant advice and homelessness prevention services provided by Threshold. The Department has made a total of more than €800,000 available to Threshold in 2017 and plans to provide a similar level of support in 2018.

My Department and I will continue to work with local authorities and AHB's to accelerate the delivery of all housing, including rapid build, in order to tackle the current housing waiting lists and to deliver homes, as quickly as possible, to those who need them.

Housing Data

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline the extent to which each of the local authorities in the greater Dublin area can indicate the likely number of new housing starts or new houses available for renting which are likely to become available in the next two to three months; his views on whether emergency powers are required to address issues in relation to the crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52531/17]

294. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the efforts to deal with the acute and increasing housing requirement throughout the greater Dublin area will be accelerated; if in the context of his discussions with the relevant local authorities, he can identify specifically the degree to which the housing need is being met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52536/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 and 294 together.

In relation to the number of new housing starts or new houses that will become available for renting, over the coming period, the housing activity reports, which are available on my Department's website, show that 19,246 new homes were granted planning permission in the 12

months to end-June 2017, an increase of 49% over the same period last year. Commencement notices are up by 37%, with notices for 17,151 new homes nationwide submitted in the year to end- October. Estimates from most economic and property commentators suggest that over 18,000 new homes will be built this year, a substantial increase on the 2016 figure of around 15,000 new homes. Clearly, all relevant indicators – including planning permissions, construction commencement notices and connections to the ESB grid - are showing very significant upward trends in home-building activity.

While my Department publishes data on total housing commencements, it does not break these down into local authority build and non-local authority build. With particular regard to the needs of those on housing waiting lists, including those in the greater Dublin area, under Rebuilding Ireland, 50,000 social housing homes will be delivered through build, rapid build, refurbishment, acquisition and leasing over the period 2016 to 2021, alongside an accelerated roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme to meet the needs of some 80,000 households.

In recognition of the serious challenges we face in terms of housing, the Government has prioritised the development and implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. There is already strong evidence that the focus on increasing and accelerating housing supply in Rebuilding Ireland is yielding results. In 2016, the housing needs of over 19,000 households were met through a range of social housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. A further €1.4 billion is being provided in 2017, to meet the housing needs of 21,000 households, a target which I am confident will be exceeded.

In addition, my Department has put in place new targeted timelines for social housing construction projects that set out the optimum timeframe from initial project concept through to design, planning, procurement and mobilisation of contractor on site. The programme puts an onus on all stakeholders to advance projects through the process in a timely manner.

My Department will continue to engage actively with all local authorities, including all four Dublin authorities, to deliver social housing through all available avenues, with a particular emphasis on additional construction projects. I am satisfied that delivery on the range of targets in Rebuilding Ireland provides a strong platform for meeting the needs of those individuals and families on social housing waiting lists, including those in the greater Dublin area, and those experiencing homelessness.

Local Authority Housing Provision

290. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if subsidised serviced sites will be made available to families on local authority housing waiting lists in the greater Dublin area with particular reference to addressing the need of that group that cannot obtain a local authority mortgage on the basis on insufficient income and cannot get onto the local authority waiting lists on the basis on excessive income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52532/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I understand that the Deputy is referring to households who on income grounds, do not qualify for social housing and who also are deemed ineligible for a local authority mortgage.

In relation to sites for affordable housing that would assist the households the Deputy refers to, on 10 July 2017, I attended the hand-over ceremony for the first five of 49 affordable homes delivered by the Ó Cualann Co-Housing Alliance in Ballymun. These homes were built on a

site provided by Dublin City Council, at a price well below the open market selling price. I was impressed with what I saw and since then, I have met with O'Cualann's representatives to discuss how the homes delivered in Ballymun can be delivered at greater scale. My Department has also arranged meetings involving O'Cualann, Dublin City Council and the Irish Council for Social Housing.

It is precisely for the purpose of scaling up delivery of this type of affordable housing that I am providing funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019. The funding will be made available to unlock local authority-owned lands specifically for affordable housing, using models such as this which have already proven to be successful but are now needed at greater scale. It is estimated that over 650 such new affordable homes could be facilitated under the new scheme.

I understand that, working with Dublin City Council, AIB and industry professionals, Ó Cualann delivered new 2-, 3- and 4-bed, A2 rated, quality homes with sales prices ranging from €140,000 to €220,000. Importantly, in terms of the model used, the Council provided serviced "ready to go" sites at very low cost, facilitating the affordable delivery and ultimate sales prices of the homes.

My Department is meeting with the Dublin local authorities this week to discuss how the new scheme will operate, and I expect to be in a position to issue a call for proposals on this matter in early 2018.

Local Authority Housing Provision

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an assessment has been done of the applicants for local authority housing in the greater Dublin area with a view to identification of those families anxious to purchase their own homes by way of private serviced sites; if a scheme will be put in place to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52533/17]

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline his views on the possibility in the greater Dublin area in cases in which some persons may be able to provide the local authority with a site, might have their housing needs met by way of provision of a local authority house on such sites thereby contributing to the housing stock, meeting their housing needs and ensuring that every avenue is explored to address the housing emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52534/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 291 and 292 together.

Local authorities have a number of options available to them in meeting social housing needs, and these include the provision of low cost sites to persons qualified for social housing support on which they would build their own homes. Another option which could be utilised by a local authority, where it considers it appropriate, is the transfer of a site from a person qualified for social housing to the local authority, and the building of a social house on the site by the local authority, to be tenanted by the person who transferred the site.

I am not aware that an assessment as referred to by the Deputy has been carried by the local authorities in the Greater Dublin area. However, it is of course open to any person who is qualified for social housing support to make any particular proposal to the relevant local authority, for their consideration, in connection with the provision or acquisition of a site.

Local Authority Housing Funding

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline the funding available to each of the local authorities in the greater Dublin area for housing purposes in 2016 and 2017; the amount spent in 2016 and to date in 2017 in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52535/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information sought in respect of funding provided for capital and current housing programmes to each of the local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area in 2016 and to date in 2017, is set out in the following table. The data includes amounts self-funded by these local authorities from surplus Local Property Tax receipts.

There is no precise amount of funding notified to individual local authorities for the delivery of housing in a particular year as my Department provides funding to local authorities as social housing projects are advanced.

Local Authority	2016 Capital Expenditure - €m	2016 Current Expenditure - €m	2017 Capital Expenditure - €m	2017 Current Expenditure - €m
Dublin City Council	122.78	107.19	111.61	127.47
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	15.93	11.59	22.96	13.05
Fingal County Council	20.35	14.53	39.83	14.62
South Dublin County Council	21.64	31.14	21.79	26.32
Kildare County Council	28.25	13.58	34.82	13.84
Wicklow County Council	8.32	6.64	4.16	5.46
Meath County Council	22.5	5.23	14.25	5.4

Question No. 294 answered with Question No. 289.

Vacant Properties

295. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to set out the number of vacant local authority housing units that have been identified by the local authorities in the greater Dublin area; if a particular reason has been identified which might contribute to the delay in making such houses available to persons; the steps he has taken to date in this regard; the steps likely to be taken in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52537/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Information on the number of vacant county council stock at any given time is not collected by my Department, as occupancy and vacancy of social housing changes continuously. This is as

would be expected where there are approximately 130,000 such homes with tenancies that are subject to change.

My Department has been providing strong funding support to all local authorities to undertake remediation work to vacant social housing units and to re-let such housing, as soon as possible. The Voids Programme, introduced by my Department in 2014, is aimed at minimising the turnaround and re-let time of vacant units and returning them to use in a very energy efficient condition.

Accordingly, there is no particular reason for delays to arise in making social homes available in the greater Dublin area and since 2014, almost €100 m in exchequer funding has been made available nationally by my Department, with over 8,000 homes remediated and returned to use. I am satisfied that all local authorities appreciate the need to quickly remediate and re-let social homes that become vacant in an area of need.

Homelessness Strategy

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if, in the context of the present housing emergency, he plans emergency measures to address the issue in view of the number of families technically homeless, living in unfit conditions, living in overcrowded conditions and sharing with families and friends, some in undesirable situations and for prolonged periods in emergency housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52538/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The most recently published statutory summary of social housing assessments relates to the assessment carried out in 2016. This records the number of households on all local authority waiting lists, as at 21 September 2016. The results of the 2016 summary show that there were 91,600 households deemed qualified for, and in need of social housing support. I expect the results of the 2017 assessment to be published shortly.

With particular regard to the needs of those on housing waiting lists and the households and families referred to by the Deputy, under Rebuilding Ireland, 50,000 social housing homes will be delivered through build, refurbishment, acquisition and leasing over the period 2016 to 2021, alongside an accelerated roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme to meet the needs of some 80,000 households.

There is already strong evidence that the focus on increasing and accelerating housing supply in Rebuilding Ireland is yielding results. In 2016, the housing needs of over 19,000 households were met through a range of social housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. A further €1.4 billion is being provided in 2017, to meet the housing needs of in excess of 21,000 new households, a target which I am confident will be exceeded.

I am satisfied that the delivery on the range of targets in Rebuilding Ireland provides a strong platform for meeting the needs of those individuals and families on social housing waiting lists and those experiencing homelessness.

Local Authority Housing Provision

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which planning procedures can be expedited to facilitate the building

of extra local authority houses with particular reference to the need to make a serious impact on the numbers on local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52539/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 amended section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, relating to the arrangements for the approval by local authorities of their own development proposals, often referred to as the Part 8 process. This amendment required a supporting amendment to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, which was provided for in the Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017.

Under the new arrangements, which came into operation with effect from 3 July 2017, the maximum timeframe for the determination of local authority-owned development proposals is now 20 weeks from the date of issue of the proposals for public consultation by the Chief Executive, whereas previously there was no maximum timeframe.

These reforms provide greater certainty for local authorities around the decision timelines associated with the various steps in the approval process of such own-development proposals, including proposals for social housing projects and infrastructure servicing both public and private development.

Local Authority Housing Provision

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has offered the option of modular housing to the various local authorities which currently have long housing waiting lists; the uptake in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52540/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including rapid build homes. There has been significant pressure to ramp-up rapid build delivery, which local authorities have been responding to positively.

As the Deputy will be aware, rapid delivery housing comprises the delivery of housing developments within a programme, which shows overall time savings, compared with traditional build programmes. To assist in accelerating social housing delivery, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), in January 2017, established a Framework Agreement with 12 Design and Build contractors for the provision of rapid delivery housing. This Framework Agreement is available to all local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs) to use for social housing projects and provides an easy access route to contractors, who have passed a suitability assessment stage and are specialist providers who are well placed to supply rapid delivery housing. Clearly, the Framework Agreement will save time on design, procurement and on the construction of social housing and aids achievement of the targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland.

The question of utilising rapid build methodologies and other innovative construction technologies, including modular is, ultimately, a matter for consideration by each local authority and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in the context of individual projects. My Department is, however, strongly encouraging the use of rapid build methodologies, including modular build, where suitable for accelerated delivery of social housing units and considerable progress is being made, with well in excess of 500 rapid build units advancing at this stage and I intend

to publish a list of all new rapid build projects early in the New Year.

My Department has held information sessions with Local Authorities and AHBs to alert them to the possibilities of modular/rapid delivery, and familiarise them with the product and the process, with a further information session scheduled later this month, including a visit for local authorities and AHBs to a rapid delivery scheme under construction. We will continue to work with local authorities and AHBs to accelerate the delivery of all housing, including rapid build, in order to tackle the current housing waiting lists and to deliver homes, as quickly as possible, to those who need them.

Homeless Persons Data

299. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the number of families deemed homeless in County Kildare are likely to obtain accommodation in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52541/17]

300. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless persons in County Kildare that have been offered and have received accommodation from the local authority in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52542/17]

301. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families rehoused by Kildare County Council in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52543/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take questions Nos. 299 to 301, inclusive, together.

Kildare County Council, along with all other local authorities, is being funded to increase significantly its delivery of social housing as part of Rebuilding Ireland. In Budget 2018, I secured €1.9 billion for housing programmes next year, a 46% increase over 2017. It will support the housing needs of 25,500 households. I have also secured additional investment for the Rebuilding Ireland overall social housing target to increase from 47,000 to 50,000 homes, with the total funding growing from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion.

An important aspect of this delivery is new social housing construction and details of all the projects under that programme are now published quarterly. The latest report, setting out the position at end Q3 2017, is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/housing-construction-report-q3/>.

This report shows a sizeable construction portfolio for County Kildare, delivering over 343 new social homes. In addition, since the end of Quarter 3, a further three new social housing construction projects, with 95 new homes, have been approved for the Kildare.

As well as the permanent accommodation solutions that are being put in place, we have also funded a new family-focused supported temporary accommodation facility in Athy, where the Council and the Peter McVerry Trust have delivered good quality, supported accommodation for 7 families who were experiencing homelessness.

In tandem with the construction programme, all local authorities have been undertaking the targeted acquisition of properties for immediate social housing use and so far this year, Kildare

County Council has purchased over 90 such new social homes. Approved housing bodies (AHBs) are also very active in delivery in Kildare, as can be seen with the 87 new homes approved through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility in 2017. AHBs also delivered a further 100 new homes during 2016/17 for priority groups on the Kildare social housing waiting list through the Capital Assistance Scheme.

The remediation and re-letting of vacant social homes has also continued and between 2014 and the end of this year, around 100 social houses in Kildare will have been returned to productive use through the programme of funding support from my Department.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme is also supporting local authorities and AHBs for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from private owners and developers for social housing use. Currently, there are around 375 operational units under this programme in Kildare.

Over 1,300 households are also being supported currently through the HAP scheme in Kildare. This will continue to provide a flexible housing support for addressing the housing needs of households presenting as homeless to Kildare County Council.

All of these additional social homes that have been already delivered in Kildare, or will be brought on stream as projects are completed, are allocated by the Council in accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations. Such allocations are a matter for the Council and accordingly, my Department does not hold information regarding their precise allocation.

Housing Provision

302. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which facilities are available to meet the housing needs of the indigenous rural population by way of ensuring an adequate number of houses in keeping with good planning principles to facilitate in so far as is possible the indigenous needs of those living in rural areas thereby reducing the impact on housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52544/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Addressing our housing shortage and homelessness crisis is the Government's number one priority. The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is focused on increasing and accelerating housing delivery, across all tenures. The funding earmarked for the social housing element of the Action Plan was increased from €5.35 billion to over €6 billion in Budget 2018.

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

In relation to social housing construction activity in general, my Department publishes comprehensive status reports on a quarterly basis, of social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas, showing details such as their locations and a range of information relating to their advancement. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of quarter 3 of 2017. It includes information on the delivery of over 12,000 new social housing homes, which are currently approved and progressing through planning, design, and construction, or

have been completed in 2016 and to the end of quarter 3 of 2017. The report can be accessed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/housing-construction-report-q3/>.

I am keen that they advance all of these projects as soon as possible and have assured them that funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard.

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

Rent Pressure Zones

303. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the variation between the annual rate of rent inflation for the Greystones and Drogheda local electoral areas for the first, second and third quarters of 2016 reported in the assessment undertaken by the Residential Tenancies Board on rent pressure zones in January 2017 and March 2017 respectively; the figures subsequently reported in the assessment for the same period in the assessment carried out in September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52557/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone.

On foot of proposals from the Housing Agency, and in accordance with section 24A(2) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended), the Director of the RTB was requested to make a report as to whether the Local Electoral Area of Greystones met the criteria for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone in January and September of this year and whether the Local Electoral Area of Drogheda met the criteria for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone in March and September of this year.

The reports received from the RTB in relation to the designation of rent pressure zones, are available on the website of the RTB at the following link:

<https://www.rtb.ie/rent-pressure-zones/rent-pressure-zone-reports>.

The assessments contained in the Rent Zone Reports are undertaken by the RTB in the performance of their functions under the Act. Some of the reports state that there may be revisions to the figures in relation to earlier quarters, due to retrospective or late registrations, as all of the RTB rent data is based on tenancy registrations.

Further details on the RTB Rent Zone Report methodology can be obtained from the RTB. On the request of the Clerk of the Dáil, arrangements have been put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P) 05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB have set up a

dedicated email address for this purpose at *OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie*.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

304. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the contingency plans in place to protect persons who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless as temperatures drop; when the winter initiative measures will be in place; the progress that has been made in opening up unused homes for families and persons that are homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52591/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At last September's Housing Summit, I emphasised the need for all housing authorities to have sufficient capacity in emergency accommodation and to have appropriate facilities in place for every person sleeping rough, on any night of the week.

I instructed the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, at that time, to set about ensuring the delivery of 200 additional permanent emergency beds by Christmas, in a range of new facilities across the city. 50 of the 200 permanent beds are now in place and the remaining 150 emergency beds will be brought into use over the coming days, with all being in place by mid-December.

As the weather becomes colder, my Department has also been working with local authorities to ensure that their Cold Weather Initiatives are in place. These arrangements ensure that additional temporary beds can be brought into use across a range of existing services and facilities for singles and couples, who need them during periods of cold weather.

In addition to the 200 new permanent beds that will be in place over the coming two weeks in Dublin, there are also more than 50 temporary beds in place, if required during the cold weather. In Cork, there are an additional 25 temporary beds in place, while in Galway an additional 34 temporary beds are in place. In Limerick, an additional 10 temporary beds are in place and in Waterford 9 additional temporary beds are also in place.

The long-term solution to the current homeless crisis is, clearly, to increase the supply of homes for those who need them. This includes opening up vacant homes for families and persons on social housing waiting lists. Under Rebuilding Ireland, 50,000 new social housing homes will be delivered over the period to 2021, supported by €6 billion in funding.

A key mechanism for dealing with homeless individuals is through the Housing First Programme, which supports homeless individuals move from emergency accommodation to independent living. 180 tenancies have been established under this Programme to date.

This programme is being prioritised and it is expected that a National Director of Housing First will be appointed shortly to drive the programme. This post will be critical in supporting those who sleep rough or reside in hostel accommodation to enter into independent living arrangements.

Bord Údarás na Gaeltachta

305. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén uair a ainmneofar comhaltaí ar Bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta ag tógáil san áireamh an phráinn a bhaineann leis seo ó tharla nach féidir aon chruinniú den bhord a eagrú go dtí go n-ainmneofar na comhaltaí agus ó tharla go bhfuil tograí coinnithe siar dá bharr. [52369/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tá an próiseas chun bord nua a cheapadh do Údarás na Gaeltachta nach mór thart. Tá ainmniúchán gach Comhairle Contae atá ábhartha faighte (Dún na nGall, Maigh Eo, Gaillimh agus Ciarraí) agus tá socruithe idir lámha ag an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí (PAS) chun na hiarratais a fuarthas a bhreithniú faoi réir na ndea-chleachtas cuí.

Nuair a bheidh sé sin déanta an tseachtain seo chugainn, cuirfidh an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí liosta d'iarratasóirí cáilithe ar aghaidh chugam chun críche breithnithe agus fógrófar comhdhéanamh an bhoird nua go poiblí ar shuíomh idirlín mo Roinne chomh luath agus is féidir ina dhiaidh sin.

Agus an bord nua ceaptha, beidh sé de chúram ar Údarás na Gaeltachta na socruithe a dhéanamh dá chéad chruinniú.

Deontais faoi Údarás na Gaeltachta

306. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil deontais ar fáil ó Údarás na Gaeltachta chun caoi a chur ar bháid thraidisiúnta; má tá, cén cineál cúnaimh atá ar fáil. [52370/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tuigtear dom, tar éis an scéal a bheith fiosraithe, nach bhfuil aon scéim ag Údarás na Gaeltachta faoina bhféadfaí cabhair airgid a fháil chun athchóiriú a dhéanamh ar bháid thraidisiúnta.

Deontais faoi Údarás na Gaeltachta

307. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén uair a chríochnófar an t-athbhreithniú atá iarrtha ag Muintearas ar chinneadh gan cuid den deontas don scéim seirbhísí réamhscoile agus Iarscoile a íoc leo. [52372/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Beidh an t-athbhreithniú atá luaite ag an Teachta á dhéanamh ag oifigeach sinsireach de chuid mo Roinne nach raibh ag plé leis an gcás seo go nuige seo.

Táthar ag súil go mbeidh an t-athbhreithniú seo críochnaithe gan mhoill.

Hare Coursing Regulation

308. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the rangers' report for the coursing meeting at Edenderry, County Offaly, on 20, 21 and 22 October 2017 records breaches of section 10 of the licensing code and that three hares which died at the event were found to have pre-existing conditions; the sanction her Department will take regarding the breach of the licence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52380/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am aware of the reports of National Parks and Wildlife Service officers of my Department in relation to coursing meetings monitored this year. All issues arising from such reports will be reviewed and considered in the context of licenses for the 2018/19 coursing season.

EU Directives

309. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a derogation from the EU birds directive will be granted to Fingal County Council to allow for the removal of nests and eggs of seagulls in the Howth area in view of the fact that the growing gull population has been causing considerable nuisance in the area in recent years during the breeding season. [52390/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The EU Birds Directive allows Member States to make derogations from its protective measures in respect of certain wild bird species in certain circumstances – for example, where they are causing damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or safety or to air safety. The Declarations to implement these derogations are renewed annually and an annual review of the Declarations is undertaken prior to their expiry. The review process includes consideration of the views of stakeholders, such as hunting and conservation bodies, and airport authorities on the operation of the declarations.

This year's review took into account the issue of seagulls in the North Dublin area especially in Balbriggan which had been the subject of correspondence to my Department from some community groups and other residents which proposed the inclusion of seagull species in the Declaration.

Following consideration of the matter, the new Declaration, which is effective from 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018, included methods to control seagull species in the Balbriggan area for public safety reasons. The control method can involve the removal of eggs and nests only; the culling of seagulls is not permitted.

These changes were introduced on a one year pilot basis and will be subject to review as part of a wider comprehensive review of the operation of the derogations next year. This comprehensive review will take account of all relevant factors, including perceived threats, distribution and population data available in respect of all the bird species in the declaration. My Department is currently examining tenders from contractors to undertake this review.

National Monuments

310. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of prosecutions under the National Monuments Acts for destruction of protected ring forts and hill forts that have been undertaken since 2007. [52411/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): All known archaeological monuments, of which there are in excess of 130,000, are entitled to protection under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014. Protection may be extended to previously unrecorded monuments by entering them in the Register of Historic Monuments or the Record of Monuments and Places. The Acts allow me to make a preservation order where I consider a national monument to be at risk.

As Minister, I am the owner or guardian under the National Monuments Acts of approximately 1,000 national monuments located at approximately 750 sites. Maintenance of such monuments is undertaken on my behalf by the Office of Public Works. Local authorities are responsible under the Acts for maintaining the national monuments of which they are owners or guardians.

My Department records all reports of damage to recorded monuments. Such reports often emanate from members of the public, local authorities or heritage-based NGOs.

My Department also liaises regularly with the utility and infrastructure providers and has agreed codes of practice with a number of these agencies aimed at safeguarding archaeological sites and monuments. In addition, awareness programmes are in place with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and farm organisations that are aimed at raising awareness in relation to farming and archaeology.

Notwithstanding the wide ranging legal provisions and other programmes in place, damage to archaeological sites and monuments does occur from time to time. Cases involving alleged wilful damage to monuments are referred to An Garda Síochána for investigation.

Since 2007, a total of nine prosecutions have been taken by the Director of Public Prosecutions on the recommendation of An Garda Síochána for alleged offences under the National Monuments Acts 1930 - 2014. Convictions were secured in all cases, four of which related to damage to, or destruction of ring forts.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Administration

311. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the length of time it is taking to process applications for cessation of turf cutting compensation schemes (details supplied); the number of staff tasked with physically checking the bogs in question; and if this case will be closed before Christmas 2017. [52415/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question.

The qualifying criteria for the scheme are that:

- The applicant must have had a legal interest (ownership or a turbary right (right to cut turf)) in one of the 36 raised bog natural heritage areas and must have had the right to cut and remove turf from the property on 25 May 2010;
- The applicant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the five year period up to 14 January 2014;
- The turbary on the site must not be exhausted; and
- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

Arising from an issue that has arisen as regards these criteria, I am advised that an inspection of the plot of bog, in respect of which the application has been received, has been carried out recently by a District Conservation Officer from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department. On the basis of the report of that inspection, the application is being processed further.

I understand that an official from my Department will be in contact with the applicant shortly.

Architectural Heritage

312. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has given consideration to the motion passed at Birr municipal district to take a building (details supplied) into State ownership in order to secure its preservation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52437/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am aware of the motion in relation to the building mentioned, which my Department has rated as being of Regional significance on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. As such, the building was recommended for and included in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) by the planning authority. Inclusion on the RPS places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities a number of powers to deal with such structures and safeguard their future.

I understand that the building in question is in a derelict condition and is now for sale. This is a commercial matter between the seller and any interested parties in which I have no function as Minister.

My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of planning authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides for the protection of architectural heritage. The Act gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to identify and protect the architectural heritage by including relevant structures on the RPS.

While my Department is not in a position to acquire the building, I understand that in 2008 a study was carried out for the planning authority to look at options for its future. In general I would be supportive of local authorities in their efforts to identify suitable uses to safeguard such buildings into the future.

Financial support is provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings. These schemes are administered via the local authorities and include the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund. These schemes will operate again in 2018. Details are available on all local authority websites and on my Department's website.

Arts Centres

313. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the €2 million funding will be available for the arts centre in Tullamore, County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52439/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In 2007, a capital grant of €2 million was approved in principle for the Tullamore Arts Centre.

The Local Authority in question has recently contacted my Department to confirm that it intends to progress the project further. I can confirm that approval in relation to this project remains open and that my Department will be in contact with the Local Authority over the coming days.

Similar to all capital grants, the funding is conditional on compliance with the specific terms and conditions which relate to it and is also subject to the Public Spending Code and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 13/2014.

