

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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

12. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether the wait times for summary decisions in relation to appeal processing times are acceptable; the steps she is taking to improve these waiting times; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2063/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): All claim decisions taken by the Department's deciding officers are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded and just 1% are appealed. Nevertheless the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible. Accordingly, significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times improved between 2011 and 2017 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 26.4 weeks in 2017 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 19.8 weeks in 2017. The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with appeal officers being required to decide all appeals on a 'de-novo' basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to review by the higher courts and decisions have to be formally written up to quasi-judicial standards.

Other factors that influence appeals times include the quality of the initial decision – in this respect the Department has changed the decision's process in respect of medical schemes, in order to provide more information to the claimant. I expect that this will help to reduce the number of appeals over time.

In addition, a number of new appeals officers have joined the appeals office over the past year, to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals process it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise. This changeover in staff has led to a slightly longer time to conclude appeals in 2017. However, I am advised by the Chief Appeals Officer that she expects performance to improve further in 2018.

Firstly, it should be noted that an appellant can claim supplementary welfare allowance pending the outcome of their appeal and that any favourable decisions are backdated to the original date of claims.

Youth Unemployment Measures

13. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the job placement types that will be encompassed under the youth employment support scheme proposed in Budget 2018. [2049/18]

33. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the youth employment support scheme will be introduced; and the specific skill benefits it will provide. [2050/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 and 33 together.

The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) is a new scheme that I intend to introduce in May/June of this year.

The scheme will be targeted at young people aged 18 to 24 who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment – people who even in the Celtic Tiger years would have found it difficult to get a foot on the career ladder.

The aim is to provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. The scheme will complement and sit alongside other opportunities developed by the Department of Education and Skills, such as the new Career Traineeships and Apprenticeships, and will broaden the choice available to young people.

The qualifying payments are Jobseekers' Payments, One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker Transition Payment, Disability Allowance, Blind Person's Pension or Supplementary Welfare Allowance. In some cases, candidates who have been in receipt of a payment for less than 12 months, but who are considered by a case worker to face significant barriers to work will be granted access to the scheme.

Young people, like other groups vary in terms of skills, aptitudes, and background so the scheme will aim to offer them a wide variety of work experience options to meet their particular needs.

The scheme will be open to employers across the private, community and voluntary sectors who meet the eligibility criteria. Public sector organisations will be excluded.

The range of skills that a participant may acquire will be dependent on the type of placement offered and the skills level of the person on commencement.

A Learning and Development Plan will be at the core of each placement and progress will be supported and monitored by a case worker in my Department on an ongoing basis.

Apart from relevant 'hard' or specific skills, there will be a focus on the acquisition and demonstration of 'soft' employability skills that will improve the participant's employment prospects, such as interpersonal and communication skills, teamwork, punctuality, time management, and customer service. Onsite work experience can be complemented by off-site training, as appropriate.

The key determinant will be whether the placement can provide a meaningful learning and development opportunity for the potential candidate.

The Host Organisation will complete an assessment for the participant at the end of the placement. Employers will be encouraged to hire participants who have performed well, and will qualify for a financial subsidy under JobsPlus Youth.

Question No. 14 answered with Question No. 7.

Pensions Reform

15. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of plans to reform the pension system which currently discriminates against persons, mainly women, that took time out of the workforce prior to 1994 to care for children or elderly relatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1879/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension contributory is paid from the Social Insurance Fund. Accordingly, it is important to ensure those qualifying for that pension have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement, all contributions, paid or credited, over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension contributory easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for another payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State pension non-contributory, which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

Due to the redistributive nature of the Social Insurance Fund, women generally get more back from their PRSI contributions than men on an actuarial basis, particularly those with lower earnings and shorter contribution years.

I plan to introduce a total contributions approach to the calculation of the State Pension (Contributory) to replace the yearly average approach from around 2020. The position of homemakers will be carefully considered in the context of that reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Offices

16. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the provision of a new full-time social welfare office in Macroom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2025/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Interviews for the Branch Manager position in Macroom, Co Cork were held on 14th of September 2017 and a preferred candidate emerged from the open recruitment competition to select a new Manager. Discussions with the candidate selected, regarding the final details of the office accommodation to be provided, have been concluded and, I as Minister, approved the appointment of the new Branch Manager on 10th January 2018. It will take a number of months for the proposed accommodation to be fitted out to the specification required by my Department for the delivery of the services and for necessary planning applications to be completed.

It is anticipated that the new Branch Office in Macroom will be open in Q2 2018.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

17. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have faced sanctions and deductions from their social welfare payments as a result of information provided by Jobpath providers; the criteria for such penalties; the right persons have to appeal such deductions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2052/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are 93,000 clients currently engaged with JobPath of which 483, or 0.5%, currently have a penalty rate applied to their claim. This figure is consistent with the overall level of penalty rate applied across all Job Seekers. In total since the JobPath service commenced, approximately 6,500 or 4.6% of the 141,000 clients who had engaged with the JobPath service (between July 2015 and December 2017) have had, at some point during their engagement period, a penalty rate applied to their payment. JobPath providers do not apply or recommend the application of a penalty rate of payment. They simply advise the Department if a jobseeker is failing to attend activation meetings. Officials in my Department then contact the Jobseeker and seek to arrange a meeting to discuss the matter directly with them. The application of penalty rates is entirely a matter for my Department and officials involved will take all relevant factors into account.

In the interests of natural justice, a jobseeker who fails to participate in the activation process, whether that is provided directly by the Intreo Service or via a contracted service provider, is given both written and verbal warnings and an opportunity to comply before a reduced rate of payment is applied. Furthermore, Jobseekers can, through co-operation with the activation service of my Department, benefit from early re-instatement of the full rate of Jobseeker's payment.

The legislation underpinning the application of reduced rates of payment is provided for in the Social Welfare Act 2010. All decisions on the application of reduced rates of payment are made by Deciding Officers and are based on all the available evidence and the circumstances of each case. The Jobseeker can appeal the Deciding Officer's decision through the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

Reduced rates are only applied where a job seeker fails to engage as requested, and following at least two warnings, with the Department's employment services.

Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 7.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

19. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of social protection payments that have been subject to sanctions in 2017 due to non-compliance or non-engagement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1967/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Penalty rates were introduced as a means of encouraging jobseekers to engage with activation measures and co-operate with efforts of the Department to assist them in securing employment. The Department is committed, under Pathways to Work, to incentivise the take-up of activation

opportunities, including implementing sanctions for failure to engage.

The application of penalty rates is provided for in Social Welfare legislation. The application of the penalty provisions can only be applied in specific circumstances and the decision to impose a penalty can only be made by a Deciding Officer of the Department. If dissatisfied with that decision it is open to the Jobseeker to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The number of instances of Penalty Rates in 2017 was 16,451, involving 13,503 individuals.

Citizen Information Services

20. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date by the Citizens Information Board with regard to the restructuring of CIS and MABS services; the timeframe for the restructuring; the estimated cost savings that will be made in 2018 as a result of the restructuring; the improved services that will be made available in 2018 as a result of this restructuring; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1908/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Citizens Information Board (CIB), which has the statutory responsibility for the Citizens Information Service (CIS) and the Money and Advice Budgeting Service (MABS) decided in February 2017 to restructure its governance arrangements. The first phase of implementation is underway in the areas of South Dublin, North Leinster (Kildare, Longford, Louth, Meath and Westmeath) and South Munster (Cork & Kerry). CIB is providing regular updates on the restructuring programme directly to all CIS and MABS Chairpersons and staff. Information sessions are being organised for Chairpersons of local services, providing an opportunity to seek clarifications on the process of transfer to the new regional companies and the wind up of the existing companies.

Implementation of the new eight region model, with the establishment of a new regional CIS and MABS company in each region, is expected to take up to two years to complete.

It is not envisaged that there will be cost savings in 2018. Cost has never been a driver of this change. The aim is to improve existing governance arrangements and to optimise the benefits from operating a more modern and streamlined citizen-focused service delivery model. For 2018, the focus for CIB and its service delivery partners is to maintain existing levels and standards of service provision to citizens during the transitional period. No major new service development initiatives are planned during this period of change.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

21. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the concerns raised by her Department as referenced in the recently published cost benefit analysis undertaken on behalf of the Citizens Information Board regarding the structure of the MABS service prior to the restructuring plans now underway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2059/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The aim of the decision by the Board of the Citizens information Board (CIB) to restructure local Citizens Information Services (CIS) and Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) company boards is to improve the governance arrangements with its downstream service delivery

partners. It must be remembered that citizen centric CIS and MABS services are 100% funded by the Exchequer. It is essential that each company operates to modern and evolving standards of corporate governance, including compliance with necessary financial and audit requirements.

Under the current unwieldy arrangements, each of the 93 services operates as independent entities and considerable administrative effort is required in the maintenance of each individual company. As many common services are delivered to citizens across the country, opportunities exist to improve service standards and consistency nationwide. Reducing the administrative burden on local service managers and re-direction of valuable resources to front line services will improve services for those who rely on them.

In parallel, improved monitoring of service delivery will assist CIB in identifying weaknesses and assist regional services in getting appropriate and suitable supports in place.

A reduction in the number of individual, yet similar, CIS and MABS companies from 93 to 16 will better facilitate adherence to required governance standards, assist CIB in meeting its legislative responsibilities as direct funder and bring CIS and MABS organisations more into line with modern public service governance guidelines and requirements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Poverty Data

22. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the action being taken to address the increase in at-risk and consistent poverty rates for persons with disabilities that was disclosed in the most recent SILC data. [1844/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The latest CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) results for 2016 shows that people in households headed by a person whose principal economic status is not at work due to illness or disability continue to experience higher at risk and consistent poverty rates than the general population. The survey also shows that social transfers play a very significant role in reducing poverty and that Ireland continues to be among the best performing EU countries in reducing poverty and inequality through spending on social protection. In 2018, expenditure on illness, disability and carers payments will amount to over €3.9 billion or almost one fifth of the total Departmental spend. This includes a €5 per week increase in the maximum weekly rate for recipients of disability allowance, invalidity pension and carer's allowance, with proportionate increases for adult dependents and an increase of €2 per child per week for qualified child dependents.

Given the continuing economic recovery throughout 2017 and the measures introduced in Budgets 2016, 2017 and 2018, it is reasonable to expect future poverty statistics to show improvements. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

It is recognised that the best route out of poverty and social exclusion is through paid employment. My Department manages a range of employment support programmes for people with disabilities, including the wage subsidy scheme, the EmployAbility service and the reasonable accommodation fund. The partial capacity benefit is also available to support people on invalidity pension or illness benefit (of more than 6 months) who have some capacity for work and who choose to return to employment. The Department's Intreo service is also available to provide employment support services for people with disabilities who wish to engage with the service on a voluntary basis. Expenditure on these programmes will amount to some

€50 million in 2018.

The Government is committed to increasing the employment opportunities for people with a disability. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities adopts a cross-government approach that brings together various measures, to be taken by different Departments and State agencies, in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on the employment of people with disabilities. The aim of the strategy is to increase the numbers of people at work, and the proportion of people with disabilities in a job.

The Government's strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion is set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The Strategy identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. The Department is reviewing the Plan, as it reached the end of its term in 2017, with a view to developing an updated plan for future periods. The Department will also review the national social target for poverty reduction. This review will be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

I can assure the Deputy that a reduction in measured poverty rates for people with a disability is a key priority of the Government. We will continue to keep the range of supports under review as well as implement the comprehensive employment strategy in order to secure better income and employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Public Services Card

23. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons that make new claims for social welfare payments must have a public services card (PSC); if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is evidence that new claimants are being told that they will not be eligible for payments unless they hold a PSC; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1911/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of SAFE 2 registration is to verify a person's identity to a substantial level of assurance. Once identity is so verified, a Public Services Card can be issued as a physical token of proof of that identity verification. My Department makes it clear to our customers that they need to complete a SAFE 2 registration to access, or continue to access, payments and entitlements. This is not an unreasonable condition given the value of payments made to customers and the overwhelming majority of customers have no difficulty in completing the process.

The legal provisions providing for and relating to SAFE registration of Social Welfare customers are set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 (as amended):

- Sections 262 and 263B provide for the verification of identity to facilitate the issuing and use of a Personal Public Services Number (PPS Number or PPSN).

- Sections 263, 263A and 263B provide for the verification of identity to facilitate the issuing, use and cancellation of a Public Services Card (PSC).

- Section 241 provides that a person must satisfy the Minister to his/her identity when making a new claim and sets out how that can be done.

- Section 247C provides that an existing claimant must satisfy the Minister to his / her identity, sets out how that can be done, and provides for disqualification where an existing claimant fails to so do.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

24. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce flexibility and support in the social welfare system for persons with mental health difficulties. [2015/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Through the operation of the income support system managed by my Department and the health service managed by the HSE, the Government recognises the need for flexible and effective support for persons who encounter mental health difficulties. Recent research by the ESRI and the OECD has drawn attention to the prevalence of mental health conditions in the working-age population. Both an effective income support system and health services are key to addressing these difficulties but the research has also demonstrated that work can be an important factor in recovery, in particular for people with mental health issues. The Make Work Pay report for People with Disabilities, published last year, identified the need for flexibility in the income support and medical card system where a person with a disability takes up a job and options available if that job does not work out. This anxiety can be particularly pronounced amongst those with mental health issues, given the episodic nature of such conditions. One of the recommendations of the report was to put in place and promote a system for fast-track reinstatement of disability allowance, illness benefit or invalidity pension to people with disabilities who have returned to work, and have subsequently had to leave their job within one year.

As a first step in implementing this recommendation a fast-track return to disability allowance protocol has now been put in place. In addition to this initiative, people who are participating on the partial capacity benefit scheme may return to illness benefit or invalidity pension if they find that they cannot continue to work.

My Department also provides a wide range of work related supports for people with disabilities, including people with mental health difficulties that they or where appropriate their employers can access while in receipt of income support payments. These include the Wage Subsidy Scheme, the EmployAbility service and employment support grants for people with disabilities.

Most recently, my Department was a partner organisation in the Integrating Employment and Mental Health Service project, which ran between 2015 and 2017. The aim of this project was to demonstrate how existing mental health and supported employment (EmployAbility) services could fulfil the best practice Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment for clients with mental health issues. An evaluation report is currently being finalised and this shows that overall, the project demonstrated good outcomes through improved integration between mental health services and employment support services. Following on from this work, my Department has been collaborating with the Department of Health and the Health Services Executive to consider how best to embed this learning within the social protection and the health systems.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

25. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the rules for calculating means for social welfare payments regarding compensation paid for damage carried out to the principal private residence of a person, by CPOs

or a State agency when the person has to invest the money back into their residence to mitigate the damage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1881/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides for the disregard of certain compensation awards when assessing the means of a person for social assistance schemes. This includes all income derived from compensation awarded by the Hepatitis C and HIV Compensation Tribunal, by the Residential Institutions Redress Board and in relation to disability caused by thalidomide. Any payment made by the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board is similarly disregarded. In addition, ex gratia payments made through the Symphysiotomy Payment Scheme or to women who were admitted to and worked in the Magdalene Laundries are also disregarded. These compensation awards and payments were disregarded over the years as a result of Government decisions and the enactment of corresponding legislation. All other compensation or court awards which are not provided for in social welfare legislation are assessed in the normal manner.

It should be noted that a payment is only assessable as long as it is accessible. In the case outlined by the Deputy, if the person who received the compensation payment invests it back into their residence, then it would not be accessible or assessable for social welfare means testing purposes.

Pensions Reform

26. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for pension reform; her further plans on introducing auto-enrolment into pensions for employees; if so, the timeframe for this plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1907/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Pensions reform is a Government priority and I can confirm an intention to publish and commence the implementation of a pensions reform plan in the near future. The plan will include measures relating to the introduction of a 'Total Contributions Approach' to the State pension for new pensioners, reform and simplification of the current supplementary pension landscape and measures required to transpose the EU 'IORP II' Pensions Directive. Perhaps the most fundamental reform measure contained within this plan will relate to the development of a new automatic enrolment supplementary retirement savings system for employees without pensions coverage. Auto enrolment would see a transition from the current and purely voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will, subject to certain parameters, automatically enrol employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement. It will increase the wellbeing, financial security and independence of future retirees.

Following publication of the reform plan, I intend that detailed evidence building and consultation will be undertaken to inform fundamental choices which are required regarding the preferred operational structure and organisational governance for a new system as well as many design elements such as contribution levels, financial incentives and target membership. Correctly positioning / designing each of these will be critical to the success of any system.

Subject to any Government decision regarding the manner in which this project should be progressed, it is my objective that first members would be enrolled in the new system by 2022. This project timeframe reflects the scale of such a programme and its importance as being the most fundamental reform of the Irish supplementary pension system in generations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Rights

27. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to solve the problems and issues surrounding seasonal and part time workers' rights in seasonal employment, in particular the fishing, farming and the hospitality sectors; the timeframe to deal with these issues in view of the fact that these anomalies are causing financial strain on many persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2017/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland has a comprehensive suite of employment rights legislation including measures to prevent exploitation in the workplace. We have a well-resourced labour inspectorate within the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which is mandated to secure compliance with employment legislation. In addition, where employees believe that they have been deprived of an employment right, they may refer a complaint to the WRC where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision enforceable through the District Court. On 7th December 2017, I published the *Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017*. The Bill delivers on the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to tackle the problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work. This is a very important piece of legislation which will improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and those working variable hours in all sectors of employment.

It provides for five key issues which will benefit part-time workers as well as seasonal employees:

- Ensuring that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and, in particular, their core terms at an early stage of their employment.
- Strengthening the provisions around minimum payments to low-paid, vulnerable employees who may be called in to work for a period but not provided with that work.
- Prohibiting zero hours contracts in most circumstances.
- Ensuring that workers on low hour contracts, who consistently work more hours each week than provided for in their contracts of employment, are entitled to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the reality of the hours they have worked over an extended period.
- Strengthening the anti-penalisation provisions for employees who try to invoke a right under this Bill.

I am looking forward to working with colleagues on all sides of both Houses of the Oireachtas to progress this Bill as expeditiously as possible over the coming months.

State Pension (Non-Contributory)

28. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason fraud and error surveys are being carried out with older persons in receipt of the non-contributory State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2060/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

Department has a duty to ensure that it pays the right person the right amount of money at the right time. It is important that all schemes operated by the Department, including State Pension (non-contributory), are subject to ongoing control reviews and continuing eligibility checks. This includes conducting fraud and error surveys which serve to reaffirm the entitlement of randomly selected recipients to their ongoing social welfare payments. Fraud and error surveys are an integral part of the Department's overall approach to control. They provide the Department with an indicator of the risk of non-compliance with scheme rules at a point in time and provide evidence on where control activities should be focused and inform risk assessment models for schemes.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) reports annually on the regularity of social welfare payments. These reports are based on the outcome of fraud and error surveys undertaken by the Department. In recent years, the C&AG has made recommendations in relation to the methodologies underpinning the surveys which have been adopted by the Department and the implementation of actions to address control weaknesses identified as a result of surveys. Surveys involve sample cases and sample sizes representative of the specific scheme claim load. Sample sizes vary between 600 and 1,000 cases, depending on the particular characteristics of the scheme being surveyed.

The schedule of surveys forms part of the Department's overall Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014 - 2018. Generally, surveys are focused on schemes that involve large value expenditure. The nature of the scheme, either means or contribution-based, is also considered in selecting schemes to be surveyed.

The survey currently underway is the first such survey of the State Pension (non-contributory) scheme. Field work on this survey is due to be completed within the next few weeks with publication of the report due later in the year. A sample of 1,000 cases is being examined as part of the survey.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

29. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the discriminatory nature of the eligibility rules for obtaining a State pension (contributory) and its affect in disadvantaging women that in the past chose to take time out of the jobs market in order to raise families. [1910/18]

39. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the action being taken to provide pension equality for those that were historically penalised for being stay at home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1986/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 39 together.

There are three main State pensions. First, the State pension non-contributory is a means-tested pension funded from taxation. Second, the State pension contributory, which is not means-tested, is paid from the Social Insurance Fund, and is funded via the PRSI system. The third main state pension available to some people over 66 is the Widows/Widowers Contributory Pension.

It is important to ensure those qualifying for the contributory pension have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. Such contributory pensions,

with rates of payment linked to contributions made into a fund, are the norm internationally.

To ensure that people can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions, paid or credited, over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension contributory easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of his or her pension.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for the means-tested State pension non-contributory, which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

When all payments across the State pension system are taken into account, the difference in the average direct payment to men and women is approximately 1% in Ireland. This would be very low by European standards, and as a result CSO figures show that poverty levels among those over 66 are very low for both men and women, and are at parity. In the latest figures, the rate of Consistent Poverty for men over 66 was 1.79% for men and 1.36% for women, compared to 8.3% for the general population.

Later this year, I plan to propose legislation to introduce a total contributions approach to the calculation of the State Pension (Contributory), replacing the current yearly average approach. The position of homemakers will be carefully considered in the context of that reform.

Finally, last year I instructed my Department officials to undertake an in-depth examination of 2012 changes to the rate bands of the State Pension (contributory), with a view to identifying equitable options for reliefs where a person's PRSI gap resulted from a period of caring for children or older people, or for those with homemaking periods prior to the introduction of the Homemaker's scheme in 1994. I am pleased to say, that this work has been completed. Later this week I will bring this report to a Cabinet Committee for discussion, with a view to bringing a proposal to Cabinet in the near future.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

State Pensions Reform

30. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to examine the pension anomaly which exists in which persons aged 65 years of age are being put on jobseeker's payments at retirement; her further plans for when the pension age increases to 67 years of age in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2062/18]

37. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of plans to reinstate the State transition pension to prevent persons forced to retire at 65 years of age having to apply for jobseeker's payments for one year until they reach

the State pensionable age of 66 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1877/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 37 together.

There are no plans to reinstate the State Pension Transition. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) which was available to people aged 65 who satisfied the qualifying conditions. This measure standardised the State pension age for all at 66 years. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to State pension age. Where this is not possible, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

We are all well aware that people are living for much longer. Life expectancy at birth has increased significantly over the years – and is now at 78.4 years for men 82.8 years for women. This is very positive. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by close to €1 billion every 5 years. The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age.

The Deputies should note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Unemployment Levels

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures she has taken to address the above average unemployment levels which persist in County Wexford; her plans to increase the number of activation case officers in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2026/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). The most recent data show that unemployment has fallen from a peak of 15% in 2012 to 6.2% by mid-2017. Numbers at work have increased from just over 1.83 million in Quarter 2, 2012 to 2.06 million in Quarter 2, 2017 – an increase of 227,000 persons. Within the South East region, which includes Wexford, unemployment has fallen from 19.0% to 8.1% over the same period, and numbers in employment have increased by 29,000 to 214,900. While data from the QNHS are not available at the county level, trends in the Live Register can give an indication of underlying trends in local unemployment. Overall, the Live Register in Wexford has fallen by almost 42% in the 5 years to December 2017, close to the reduction of 44% nationally. In the year to December 2017, the Live Register in Wexford has fallen by 1,707 people, or

almost 14%, again closely in line with the national trend. The Government's primary strategy to tackle unemployment since 2012 is twofold:

- Firstly, through policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, to create an environment in which business can succeed and create jobs. This policy now includes a specific regional Action Plan for the South East Region that has seen over 8,000 jobs created in the region in the last two years.

- Secondly, through Pathways to Work, my Department ensures that as many new jobs and vacancies as possible are filled by people taken from the Live Register. Under this policy, employment services and activation supports are heavily concentrated on the areas of highest unemployment, including those in Wexford.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing unemployment, both nationally and in Wexford and I am confident that they will continue to do so.

Currently, there are 11 Activation Case Officers in Wexford. This is an increase of one in comparison to January 2017, when there were 10. Prior to the roll-out of Intreo, there were 8 Activation Case Officers in Wexford, including former FAS personnel and DSP Jobs Facilitators.

The Case Officer capacity is supplemented by referrals to Turas Nua under the Job Path programme and to Wexford Local Development which operates the Local Employment Service (LES) on behalf of the Department. Wexford Local Development is contracted to provide intensive supports to 960 customers and employs 8 mediators to support LES operations.

A total of 9,114 customer engagements were scheduled by Activation Case Officers in 2017 in addition to their work with employers. Local records indicate that approximately 5,300 referrals to Turas Nua took place over the course of the year.

My Department is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and the focus remains on ensuring that the best use is made of all available resources. Against that background, and a falling Live Register, there are currently no plans to increase the number of Activation Case Officers. However, the matter is kept under constant review in light of changing circumstances.

Exceptional Needs Payments

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the directive given from her Department that the circumstances surrounding the need for an exceptional needs payment must be unforeseen as well as exceptional; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1847/18]

38. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level and amount of exceptional needs payments that have been made in County Tipperary over the past four years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1988/18]

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for exceptional needs payments in each of the past three years and to date in 2018; the number approved, refused or pending respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2373/18]

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which funding for exceptional needs payments became exhausted in her

Department before the end of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2385/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32, 38, 217 and 229 together.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income.

An urgent needs payment (UNP) is a once-off payment made to persons who may not normally qualify for SWA but who have an urgent need which they cannot meet from their own resources or an alternative is not available at that time. The Government has provided €36.42 million for these payments in 2018.

Nearly all of the expenditure incurred by the Department, including that for exceptional payment, is demand-led. Demand for the Department's schemes is driven by demographic trends and economic factors such as developments in the labour market. Where additional moneys are required to meet demand on overall expenditure for the year, the Department may seek a Supplementary Estimate. The Government had provided €31.5 million for ENPs and UNPs in the Revised Estimates for 2017 with an additional €5.7 million made available through the recent Supplementary Estimate giving a total allocation of €37.2 million in 2017.

The legislation does not confer a statutory right or entitlement to ENPs. The guidelines issued to staff administering the ENP scheme assist them in the decision making process. The principle consideration in making a payment under the ENP scheme is to address a particular once-off and exceptional need which is not of an expected or recurring nature and is therefore by its nature generally unforeseen. The guidelines do not affect the discretion available to officers in issuing an ENP to assist an individual or household in any particular hardship situation which may arise, so that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the ENP scheme, however they are not maintained on the number of applications or the outcome of those applications. Details of the number of payments and expenditure made under the ENP scheme in County Tipperary for 2014 to 2017 are set out in Table 1 and the total number of payments for the years 2015 to 2018 are set out in Table 2 of the following tabular statement. For reporting purposes this data also includes the numbers of urgent needs payments (UNP).

Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an ENP should contact my Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Tabular Statement

Table 1 - Number of Exceptional Needs Payments and Exchequer Outturn made in Co. Tipperary by year

Year	Number of Payments	Outturn (million)
2014	5,760	€1.6
2015	5,653	€1.7
2016	4,602	€1.5
2017*	4,095	€1.4

*2017 Outturn is provisional

Table 2 - Number of Payments under the Exceptional Needs Scheme, 2015-2018 (12 January 2018)

Year	Number of Payments
2015	101,600
2016	100,100
2017	103,500
2018*	3,200

Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 13.

Pension Provisions

34. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the attempt by a company (details supplied) to unilaterally alter its workers' defined benefit pension scheme; if proposed legislation to protect such schemes will be forthcoming in order to cease such attempts by employers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2051/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment on issues relating to a particular pension scheme. However, generally speaking, trustees of pension schemes have duties and responsibilities under trust law, under other relevant legislation and under the Pensions Act. They must administer the trust in accordance with the law and the terms of the trust deed and rules. The provisions of the Pensions Act are enforced by the Pensions Authority so any issues or complaints in relation to a particular scheme should be notified to the Authority for action. The Pensions Authority will assess if there has been a breach of any legal obligations and take any necessary action if such a breach is found.

I intend to introduce a number of amendments to the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill at Committee Stage which will ensure that a sponsoring employer cannot "walk away" at short notice from the company pension scheme.

The amendments will provide for a 12 month notification period where an employer is seeking to cease making contributions to a scheme. They will also provide that, where a scheme is in deficit and a funding proposal is not been put in place in a timely manner, the Pensions Authority may direct a funding obligation to be paid by the employer to the scheme.

There was not adequate time to include these technical and complex measures in the text of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 at Second Stage. I expect to introduce these amendments to the Bill at Committee Stage in the coming weeks.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Operations

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the tender recently published by her Department seeking advice and support in relation to the SAFE programme project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2027/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department published a tender for the supply of technical support and advice in respect of the SAFE Programme on the 5th of January 2018. My Department requires independent expertise; advice and support in the area of electronic card and chip technology to support work being undertaken under the SAFE / Public Services Card (PSC) Project on behalf of all public bodies. This expertise and advice is required at both the detailed technical level and the strategic level. This expertise is not available within my Department. The tender is for the provision of 175 days service over a five year period.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Poverty Data

36. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the latest SILC data which shows that 40.2% of lone parent households are at risk of poverty, 24.6% are in consistent poverty and 50.1% are experiencing deprivation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1964/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The best way to tackle poverty among lone parents is through employment and the recently published Indecon report echoed this view. The report found that the changes to the one-parent family payment scheme made over the last number of years increased employment and reduced welfare dependency. It also found that the changes increased the probability of employment and higher employment income for lone parents. The report also concluded that assisting lone parents to enhance skills also needs to be seen as a key objective as low paid employment will not, on its own, ensure a reduction in the risk of poverty. The full impact of the economic recovery is not reflected in these 2016 figures.

Unemployment has fallen from 7.5% in November 2016 to 6.1% in November 2017, its lowest level in 9 and a half years. The positive impact of recent Budgets on lone parents and the full impact of the increases in employment are also not reflected in these SILC figures. Continued economic recovery, together with these Budget measures, is likely to have impacted positively on poverty rates since 2016 and this improvement is expected to continue over the coming years.

In 2017, further Budget improvements were implemented, and I have continued to emphasise improvements for lone parents in particular. My Department’s social impact assessments of Budgets 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 are an indicator of this improvement. These show a cumulative increase of €36.75 in the average weekly household income of employed lone parents and €33.60 for unemployed lone parents. This compares favourably with a weekly increase of €34.45 for the average household.

Budget measures that I announced and that will take effect from 29th March 2018 (specifically the increases to the income disregard, the primary rate and the increase for a qualified child) will see a lone parent on the one-parent family payment and jobseeker’s transitional payment working 15 hours a week on the National Minimum Wage better off by almost €1000 per year.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 30.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 32.

Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 29.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

40. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of invalidity pension and disability allowance applications received in 2015, 2016 and 2017; the number of refusals at first instance; the number granted on appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2047/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the tables.

Invalidity Pension and Disability Allowance claims registered, awarded and rejected on appeal in each year 2015 to 2017. Claims may be decided in a different year from the year of registration.

Invalidity Pension			
-	Registered	Awarded	Rejected
2015	9,454	7,691	5,070
2016	9,134	7,467	3,909
2017	10,458	8,976	4,579
Disability Allowance			
-	Registered	Awarded	Rejected
2015	22,538	15,814	14,800
2016	22,804	16,669	12,027
2017	23,657	17,469	12,022

Outcome of Invalidity Pension Appeals 2015– 2017			
-	Revised Deciding Officers Decisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed
2015	511	1,135	17
2016	642	682	10
2017	691	365	7
Outcome of Disability Allowance Appeals 2015– 2017			
-	Revised Deciding Officers Decisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed
2015	1,443	3,384	85
2016	815	2,830	88
2017	563	2,975	70

Anti-Poverty Strategy

41. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the likelihood of the national social target for poverty reduction being met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1963/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The national social target for poverty reduction agreed by Government in 2012 is to reduce consistent poverty from 6.3% in 2010 to 4% by 2016 and to 2% or less by 2020. This was an ambitious target, particularly during a time of economic recession, but one to which the Government has remained committed. Data from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)

indicate that consistent poverty rose sharply after 2010, to a peak of 9.1% in 2013. The latest SILC 2016 data, released by the CSO in December 2017, indicate that this had reduced to 8.3%. A reduction of 6 percentage points would now be required to meet the 2020 poverty target. The impact of the recovery is not yet fully reflected in these most recent data, which reflect income conditions in 2015-2016. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. Unemployment has fallen from 9.4% in mid-2015 to 6.1% towards the end of 2017. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall.

In addition, Budget 2018 introduced increases in a range of supports including €5 per week increases in the maximum weekly rate for working-age people and young jobseekers and for pensioners, with proportionate increases for adult dependents and an increase of €2 per child per week for qualified child dependents. These increases will assist those individuals and families who are most in need.

Given the continuing economic recovery and measures introduced in Budgets 2017 and 2018, I expect the figures for 2017 and 2018, when they become available, to show further improvement over the 2016 outcomes. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

The Government's strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion is set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The Plan identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. My Department is currently reviewing the Plan, with a view to developing an updated plan for future periods. As part of this update, the Department is also reviewing the national social target for poverty reduction. This review will be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

State Pension (Contributory)

42. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the commitment to remove the anomalies in the method of calculation of entitlements to the State contributory pension; her plans to bring forward the necessary legislative measures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1875/18]

46. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to address the issue of pension equality and to reverse the changes to the bands for the contributory pension which were introduced in 2012 and had an adverse effect on older persons and women in particular; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2031/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 46 together.

The current rate bands applying to the State pension contributory were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. The rate bands prior to 2000 were less generous, and the improved rate bands introduced in 2000 were a feature of the economic and political environment at that time. The economic crash changed the focus and while other payments were reduced as a result, the core rates of the pension, which many pensioners were solely dependent on, were maintained. Instead, the rates for people who had additional means and lesser PRSI contribution records were reduced.

The 2012 rate bands more closely reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person than those in place between 2000 and 2012. The current rate bands still provide pen-

sions to people which are very favourable in comparison with their level of contribution over their working lives. A person with only 20 years of contributions over nearly 50 years will still get an 85% pension. Where they have limited additional means, they may instead be paid a non-contributory pension of up to 95% the maximum contributory rate, and over 70% of such pensioners are paid that pension at that rate.

It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands from January 2018 would result in an annual cost of well over €70 million extra in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 to €12 million extra each following year.

I committed to examine in depth various options that may provide some relief to those who would have a higher contributory pension had the rate bands not been amended in 2012. Officials in my Department have completed a report on this matter, which I intend to bring to a cabinet committee later this week. Following that meeting, and subject to any necessary amendment or further discussions, I will bring the report to Government for consideration.

The National Pensions Framework proposed that a total contribution approach should replace the yearly average approach to the calculation of the State Pension (contributory). It is intended to introduce a total contributions approach for new pensioners from 2020. This will make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. It will also have significant homemakers provisions that will assist those pensioners who spent significant periods caring for their children, or adults with a caring need.

A discussion paper is being drafted by my Department and it is hoped to start the consultation process with relevant stakeholders including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas shortly. Following the consultation period, a proposal to Government will be submitted seeking approval of the new approach.

The main aim of Government policy on pensions is to make sure that pensions are affordable, sustainable and keep their value in the coming years. The reforms that are planned will result in a more inclusive and fairer pension system for all citizens.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

43. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if extra staff are required to facilitate a more rapid process of appeals having particular regard to the hardship and stress caused by delays which appear to affect the system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2033/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The average appeal processing times for all appeals determined from 2015 to 2017 broken down by all social welfare scheme types is outlined in the tables. My Department, like all Government departments and agencies is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department has involved reductions in staff. The staffing needs for all areas within the Department, including the Social Welfare Appeals Office and all areas involved in the processing of appeals, are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the ongoing need to respond to new increasing demands in a wide range of services. This is to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

Appeal processing times are kept under constant scrutiny by the Chief Appeals Officer. The Deputy will be aware that significant effort and resources have been devoted in recent years to reducing the length of the time taken to finalise an appeal and that as a consequence processing times have improved quite considerably.

The overall average processing time, across all schemes, for appeals requiring an oral hearing reduced from 52.5 weeks in 2011 to 25.5 weeks in 2015, and 24.1 weeks in 2016. The overall average time taken to finalise appeals decided by way of a summary decision has also improved in recent years from a peak of 25.1 weeks in 2011 to 18.1 weeks in 2015, and 17.6 weeks in 2016.

I understand from the Chief Appeals Officer that there has been a slight increase in overall appeal processing times to date in 2017 with appeals requiring an oral hearing taking an average of 26.4 weeks and summary decisions taking 19.8 weeks to finalise. However she is hopeful that this will be addressed in the coming months as a number of newly appointed Appeals Officers become more experienced in their roles.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects all aspects of the appeal process including time spent in the Department preparing the appeal submission. The quasi-judicial nature of the appeals system means that there are inevitable time-lags involved. The time taken is proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which require a high level of judgement, and the need to ensure due process and natural justice. The system is designed to be flexible and fair and allows for review and submission of further information at all stages which is to the benefit of the appellant.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times will continue to be a priority for her office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeals Processing Times by Scheme 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2015

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	21.1	30.7
Carers Allowance	20.6	25.9
Carers Benefit	19.7	21.8
Child Benefit	24.8	34.7
Disability Allowance	15.8	21.4
Illness Benefit	26.3	33.1
Partial Capacity Benefit	25.7	43.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	21.7	28.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	19.7	26.2
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	16.2
Farm Assist	21.0	28.6
Bereavement Grant	65.7	26.0
Death Benefit (Pension)	-	22.6
Family Income Supplement	19.4	27.7
Invalidity Pension	26.2	28.4
Liable Relatives	22.8	31.2
Maternity Benefit	22.6	17.5
One Parent Family Payment	22.9	33.9
State Pension (Contributory)	26.0	46.0

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.4	30.8
State Pension (Transition)	80.1	53.4
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.3	35.0
Disablement Pension	23.7	35.3
Incapacity Supplement	41.2	51.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	18.2	27.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.7	31.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	15.8	26.0
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.2	21.9
JA/JB Fraud Control	-	46.1
BTW Family Dividend	14.1	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	12.9	21.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	21.0	30.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	14.3	21.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	15.0	-
Treatment Benefit	17.9	-
Carer's Support Grant *	21.2	23.6
Insurability of Employment	47.6	69.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	13.1	23.5
Survivor's Pension (Con)	24.1	46.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.7	38.3
Widows Parent Grant	18.4	-
All Appeals	18.1	25.5

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2016

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	18.2	33.8
Carers Allowance	17.6	21.6
Carers Benefit	20.7	22.4
Child Benefit	22.1	38.2
Disability Allowance	14.6	20.1
Illness Benefit	27.2	34.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	27.3	33.6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.3	30.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.0	32.8
Farm Assist	21.9	26.0
Bereavement Grant	23.1	-
Death Benefit (Pension)	19.7	-
Liability Relatives	14.0	16.9
Family Income Supplement	20.4	25.5
Invalidity Pension	21.3	28.2
Maternity Benefit	18.9	21.7

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	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
One Parent Family Payment	21.7	31.9
State Pension (Contributory)	25.6	45.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	22.7	32.9
State Pension (Transition)	67.7	61.3
Occupational Injury Benefit	25.0	31.9
Disablement Pension	25.8	26.8
Incapacity Supplement	27.7	50.9
Guardian's Payment (Con)	15.8	24.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.4	23.3
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.7	25.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.0	20.9
BTW Family Dividend	21.0	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.0	22.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	32.5	31.6
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.0	27.2
Treatment Benefit	17.1	-
Carer's Support Grant *	18.1	23.3
Insurability of Employment	36.6	85.7
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	15.0	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	16.6	28.8
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	18.4	23.4
Widows Parent Grant	23.5	63.8
All Appeals	17.6	24.1

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01 January 2017- 31 December 2017

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	13.4	-
Blind Person's Pension	20.1	24.4
Carers Allowance	21.7	24.0
Carers Benefit	17.8	21.3
Child Benefit	22.8	32.4
Disability Allowance	17.3	24.1
Illness Benefit	28.0	30.6
Partial Capacity Benefit	33.3	35.7
Domiciliary Care Allowance	27.2	34.4
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.1	27.7
Farm Assist	20.7	25.8
Bereavement Grant	15.1	-
Family Income Supplement	22.9	34.6
Invalidity Pension	16.9	23.7
Liable Relatives	25.3	24.0

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Maternity Benefit	18.8	19.3
Paternity Benefit	18.3	-
One Parent Family Payment	26.1	34.7
State Pension (Contributory)	32.1	45.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	25.9	35.3
State Pension (Transition)	60.4	-
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.0	26.4
Disablement Pension	25.0	28.3
OIB-Medical Care	-	27.3
Incapacity Supplement	47.8	37.2
Guardian's Payment (Con)	23.7	27.0
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	16.0	23.1
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	19.6	27.3
Jobseeker's Allowance	18.3	24.8
BTW Family Dividend	19.8	27.5
Jobseeker's Transitional	22.1	23.2
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	27.4	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	20.6	24.2
Carer's Support Grant *	18.5	25.6
Treatment Benefit	14.0	-
Insurability of Employment	42.8	90.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16.4	25.8
Survivor's Pension (Con)	23.0	44.7
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.3	24.7
Widowed Parent Grant	19.5	-
All Appeals	19.8	26.4

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which her attention has been drawn to the impact of cessation of a means tested payment for any reason affecting in particular persons dependent on rent support while on local authority housing lists which, in many cases, can lead to accumulated arrears of rent and as a consequence homelessness; if the issue can be reviewed with the objective of ensuring that payment is continued while under investigation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2034/18]

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that interruptions in respect of payment of rent support will almost certainly lead to homelessness in view of the fact that persons in receipt of rent support have no other means of providing themselves with a home and that incurring arrears makes it virtually impossible for them to obtain a rental property; if measures can be taken to ensure that the equivalent of a rent support payment continues to be paid to recipients during the course of other investigations such as means testing into their circumstances; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [2382/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Question Nos 44 and 226 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting 34,400 recipients for which the Government has provided €180 million for in 2018. Continued entitlement to rent supplement is not linked to entitlement to other social welfare schemes, however the rent supplement claim may be reviewed following a decision to suspend or disallow a primary social welfare payment as there may be a change to the claimant's circumstances that could affect eligibility. During a review of a rent supplement claim, the Department's officer in the Community Welfare Service (CWS) will engage with the customer to establish continued eligibility as quickly as possible and limit any delay to payments, including the issue of any outstanding arrears payments.

Every effort is made so that rent supplement tenants are supported by my Department and any person in the situation referred to by the Deputy is encouraged to contact the CWS office responsible for their claim at the earliest opportunity.

I have no plans to introduce a further payment for rent supplement recipients. The Deputy will be aware that the strategic policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support with the introduction of the HAP scheme. There are currently over 31,500 HAP cases in payment and officials in my Department continue to support the transfer of cases from long term rent supplement to this scheme.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Employment Rights

45. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the report into seasonal and part time workers' rights and entitlements to social welfare payments drafted by her Department; her plans regarding the problems experienced by those persons in obtaining social welfare payments once their part time work ceases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2016/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department's main social welfare schemes for unemployed persons are the jobseeker's allowance and the jobseekers benefit schemes. Both schemes provide significant support to individuals so that they can work up to 3 days a week and still retain access to a reduced jobseeker's payment. The 2018 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's schemes of €2.17 billion. At present an individual can earn a little over €19,760 per year and still retain a small jobseeker's allowance payment, while the equivalent threshold for an individual with a qualified adult is almost €33,975 if they are both working. Where a person's part time employment ceases they can apply for jobseekers allowance which is a means tested payment or if they have the required number of contributions they may have an entitlement to jobseekers benefit. An Taoiseach, in his previous role as Minister for Social Protection, gave a commitment at Dáil report stage of the Social Welfare Bill 2016 that he would ask officials to examine the issue of jobseeker's benefit and the treatment of part-time and seasonal workers, including those categorised as having subsidiary employment. My officials have recently completed this report on these issues which I will consider in detail.

My Department is currently collating data in relation to those who qualify for Jobseekers Benefit and who are in subsidiary employment. We will have 12 months of data gathered by

May 2018 at which point I will be in a better position to make an informed decision on this issue.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 42.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

47. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that sufficient support exists for the development and growth of community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1987/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, Community Employment (CE) schemes are typically sponsored by voluntary and community organisations wishing to benefit their community. My Department's priority in supporting CE is to ensure access to good quality work experience and training qualifications on schemes for jobseekers and other vulnerable groups in order to support their progression into employment. In the context of the economic recovery, my Department undertook a review of the work programmes in 2016. While the primary focus was on CE, the review also looked at other employment programmes such as Tús. Arising from the review, the Government agreed to implement changes to the qualifying conditions for CE in order to broaden access to a wider range of people. These new rules were implemented from July 2017. The qualifying age was reduced to 21 years. In addition, while in general all placements will now be for one year only, if a CE participant is undertaking training to achieve a major award, their time can be extended by up to 2 year to allow them to complete the training which will enhance their overall employment prospects. This allows for 3 years continuous participation on CE. Those over 55 years of age can also remain on CE for three years. In addition, the reference year for CE participation was moved from 2000 to 2007 which ensures that more people can re-qualify for the programme. Overall, these changes improve the way the schemes operate and will allow more people who are long-term unemployed to access them.

The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services around the country. In this regard, if any scheme is experiencing particular recruitment difficulties, they should contact their local Department Intreo Centre for assistance

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Maintenance Payments

48. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to establish a child maintenance service such as in Northern Ireland to support and assist lone parents in seeking child maintenance payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2058/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The establishment of a child maintenance service such as one that currently exists in Northern Ireland would be a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. In cases where the family unit has broken down obligations regarding child maintenance continue to apply and relevant maintenance payments can be arranged either directly between the couple themselves or through supports like the Family Mediation Service, the Legal Aid Board and the Courts. The arrangement of maintenance is therefore a matter between both parents regardless of whether

or not either parent is in receipt of a social welfare payment. My Department has previously indicated its intention to review the current maintenance and liable relative procedures in light of the changes to the one-parent family payment scheme, and work had commenced on this review. Since April 2017, however, work on the review of the one-parent family payment, which was required to be completed over a short timeframe, took priority given the statutory nature of the review.

That review (the Indecon Report) was completed in October 2017 and the Report was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. Work has now re-commenced on the review of maintenance as it relates to my Department. This review will necessitate my Department liaising with the Department of Justice and Equality as the Family Law Acts, which place a legal obligation on parents to maintain their children, are under the remit of that Department.

This is a complex area however I expect to have a paper from my officials on this shortly.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

49. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on appeal processing times for essential social protection payments in view of the fact that the average waiting time on appeal at the end of 2017 for an oral hearing was 26.2 weeks and 19.7 weeks to finalise a summary decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1965/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The average appeal processing times for all appeals determined from 2015 to 2017 broken down by all social welfare scheme types is outlined in the tables. Significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times improved between 2011 and 2016 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 24.1 weeks in 2016 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 17.6 weeks in 2016. I understand from the Chief Appeals Officer that there has been a slight increase in processing times in 2017 with oral hearings taking, on average, 26.4 weeks and summary decisions taking 19.8 weeks to finalise. A number of factors have contributed to the increase including the retirement of six experienced Appeals Officers during the first half of 2017. However, she is hopeful that processing times will improve as a number of newly appointed Officers gain experience in their roles.

Specific actions taken to reduce processing times include: liaising with HR to ensure that vacancies are filled quickly; ensuring that training is given to new Appeals Officers as early as possible; working with the Department to reduce time in submitting appeal files.

It is open to an appellant to claim supplementary welfare allowance pending the outcome of their appeal if their means are insufficient to meet their needs.

The Chief Appeals Officer assures me that processing times are a priority. However, the drive for efficiency must be balanced with the competing demand to ensure that decisions are consistent and of high quality.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeals Processing Times by Scheme 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2015

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	21.1	30.7
Carers Allowance	20.6	25.9
Carers Benefit	19.7	21.8
Child Benefit	24.8	34.7
Disability Allowance	15.8	21.4
Illness Benefit	26.3	33.1
Partial Capacity Benefit	25.7	43.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	21.7	28.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	19.7	26.2
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	16.2
Farm Assist	21.0	28.6
Bereavement Grant	65.7	26.0
Death Benefit (Pension)	-	22.6
Family Income Supplement	19.4	27.7
Invalidity Pension	26.2	28.4
Liable Relatives	22.8	31.2
Maternity Benefit	22.6	17.5
One Parent Family Payment	22.9	33.9
State Pension (Contributory)	26.0	46.0
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.4	30.8
State Pension (Transition)	80.1	53.4
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.3	35.0
Disablement Pension	23.7	35.3
Incapacity Supplement	41.2	51.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	18.2	27.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.7	31.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	15.8	26.0
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.2	21.9
JA/JB Fraud Control	-	46.1
BTW Family Dividend	14.1	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	12.9	21.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	21.0	30.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	14.3	21.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	15.0	-
Treatment Benefit	17.9	-
Carer's Support Grant *	21.2	23.6
Insurability of Employment	47.6	69.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	13.1	23.5
Survivor's Pension (Con)	24.1	46.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.7	38.3
Widows Parent Grant	18.4	-
All Appeals	18.1	25.5

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2016

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	18.2	33.8
Carers Allowance	17.6	21.6
Carers Benefit	20.7	22.4
Child Benefit	22.1	38.2
Disability Allowance	14.6	20.1
Illness Benefit	27.2	34.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	27.3	33.6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.3	30.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.0	32.8
Farm Assist	21.9	26.0
Bereavement Grant	23.1	-
Death Benefit (Pension)	19.7	-
Liabile Relatives	14.0	16.9
Family Income Supplement	20.4	25.5
Invalidity Pension	21.3	28.2
Maternity Benefit	18.9	21.7
One Parent Family Payment	21.7	31.9
State Pension (Contributory)	25.6	45.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	22.7	32.9
State Pension (Transition)	67.7	61.3
Occupational Injury Benefit	25.0	31.9
Disablement Pension	25.8	26.8
Incapacity Supplement	27.7	50.9
Guardian's Payment (Con)	15.8	24.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.4	23.3
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.7	25.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.0	20.9
BTW Family Dividend	21.0	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.0	22.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	32.5	31.6
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.0	27.2
Treatment Benefit	17.1	-
Carer's Support Grant *	18.1	23.3
Insurability of Employment	36.6	85.7
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	15.0	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	16.6	28.8
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	18.4	23.4
Widows Parent Grant	23.5	63.8
All Appeals	17.6	24.1

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01 January 2017- 31 December 2017

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	13.4	-
Blind Person's Pension	20.1	24.4
Carers Allowance	21.7	24.0
Carers Benefit	17.8	21.3
Child Benefit	22.8	32.4
Disability Allowance	17.3	24.1
Illness Benefit	28.0	30.6
Partial Capacity Benefit	33.3	35.7
Domiciliary Care Allowance	27.2	34.4
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.1	27.7
Farm Assist	20.7	25.8
Bereavement Grant	15.1	-
Family Income Supplement	22.9	34.6
Invalidity Pension	16.9	23.7
Liable Relatives	25.3	24.0
Maternity Benefit	18.8	19.3
Paternity Benefit	18.3	-
One Parent Family Payment	26.1	34.7
State Pension (Contributory)	32.1	45.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	25.9	35.3
State Pension (Transition)	60.4	-
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.0	26.4
Disablement Pension	25.0	28.3
OIB-Medical Care	-	27.3
Incapacity Supplement	47.8	37.2
Guardian's Payment (Con)	23.7	27.0
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	16.0	23.1
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	19.6	27.3
Jobseeker's Allowance	18.3	24.8
BTW Family Dividend	19.8	27.5
Jobseeker's Transitional	22.1	23.2
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	27.4	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	20.6	24.2
Carer's Support Grant *	18.5	25.6
Treatment Benefit	14.0	-
Insurability of Employment	42.8	90.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16.4	25.8
Survivor's Pension (Con)	23.0	44.7
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.3	24.7
Widowed Parent Grant	19.5	-
All Appeals	19.8	26.4

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

50. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2287/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A capital plan for the period 2018 to 2027 is being developed under the National Planning Framework. My Department is engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure that this plan includes the appropriate level of capital investment to enable the Defence Organisation to deliver effectively on all their assigned roles, as set out in the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

For the period 2018 to 2021, the capital funding envelope for Defence will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, as set out in the White Paper. Projects prioritised for inclusion are as follows:

- Mid-life upgrade of the Army Mowag APC armoured fleet;
- Ongoing Naval vessel replacement programme;
- Mid-life refit of the Naval Service vessels LÉ Niamh and LÉ Roisín;
- Replacement of the Air Corps Cessna Aircraft;
- CASA Maritime Patrol Aircraft Replacement Programme;
- Ongoing investment in the modernisation and renewal of barrack infrastructure;
- Investment in additional force protection measures.

Such funding will play a vital role in ensuring that the priorities identified in the White Paper can be met and that the Defence Forces can deliver fully on the roles assigned by Government.

Departmental Data

51. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2313/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that no bullying or sexual harassment claims have been received in the years since 2011 in respect of civil servants employed by my Department.

One case of alleged bullying and harassment has resulted in compensation being paid out to a civilian employee by the Department. The case was settled in 2015 and the terms of the settlement, including the amount of compensation, decreed that it was confidential to the parties involved. An investigation is currently underway into an allegation of bullying in respect of a civilian employee of my Department.

The Civil Service Dignity at Work Policy was rolled out to all civil service staff in my De-

partment in 2015 and staff are reminded of the aims of the Policy, which deals with bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, annually. The Policy is also provided to all new staff joining my Department and is posted on the Department's Intranet. A similar policy is in place for civilian employees of my Department.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

52. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2291/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Engagements between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the forthcoming capital review are at an early stage and therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment on these negotiations at this time.

My Department's priorities for 2018 include the ongoing implementation of the passport reform process as its online services are further expanded beyond the online adult passport renewal service launched last year; continued investment in our global property network including the commencement of the development of a new Embassy/Ireland House facility in Tokyo; Embassy projects, ongoing maintenance, security improvements, health and safety improvements, etc; and the maintenance and enhancement of the Department's ICT global communications network and new ICT system enhancements.

My officials look forward to engaging with officials from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to finalise the capital review as soon as possible.

Departmental Data

53. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2317/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department examines all formal complaints made to its Human Resources Unit no matter what category they fall under. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's processes for dealing with bullying, sexual harassment and related complaints are outlined in the 2015 "Dignity at Work" policy – an anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy for the civil service. The policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety and equality in the workplace. Prior to 2015, such complaints were dealt with under the "Positive Working Environment" policy.

Since 2011, the HR Unit of the Department has conducted or facilitated formal investigations into a small number of complaints under the specific categories mentioned. Where complaints were found to be upheld appropriate disciplinary action was taken in accordance with the Civil Service Disciplinary Code.

Due to the small number of complaints, it would not be appropriate for the Department to provide additional details including on investigations and outcomes as doing so could poten-

tially identify the individuals in question.

Overseas Development Aid Data

54. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the aid funding his Department has provided to countries and territories (details supplied) since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2328/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our priorities are clearly laid out in the Government's development policy, 'One World One Future'. In line with our commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, our aid programme is sharply focused on delivering our goals of reducing poverty and hunger, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and building more equitable and better systems of governance.

My Department provides development assistance to over eighty of the world's least developed countries, supporting their development needs and responding to emergencies and protracted crises with humanitarian assistance. Sub-Saharan Africa is our priority region, where we direct assistance to the poorest communities, delivering real and sustainable improvements to the lives of some of the world poorest and most vulnerable people in the areas of basic health, education, agriculture, and food production.

We focus in particular on a small number of key bilateral countries where we have a resident embassy and a team of development specialist and advisors who manage and oversee those country aid programmes. Our engagement with our partner countries is at a strategic level, and we provide support for their long-term development. These countries are Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Vietnam. Smaller more focused programs are delivered in countries and territories such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Liberia, Kenya and Palestine.

Ireland's aid programme is delivered through a wide range of partners and channels, including partner government systems, Irish and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and missionary organisations, and UN and other multilateral agencies and organisations. We engage with UN and multilateral agencies whose core mission and objectives are closely aligned to Ireland's aid priorities, allowing us to work with and support vulnerable communities across most developing countries.

The full list of ODA eligible countries is published annually by the OECD Development Assistance Committee and is available at the following link:

www.oecd.org/dac/stats/documentupload/DAC%20List%20of%20ODA%20Recipients%202014%20final.pdf

The total Bilateral ODA provided by my Department to each ODA eligible country requested by the Deputy for the period 2011 to 2016 is detailed in the following table. 2017 figures are currently being finalised and compiled. These totals do not include the imputed figure in respect of core support to UN agencies which is ultimately attributable to the respective ODA recipient country.

Bilateral ODA 2011 to 2016 inclusive

Country	€ millions
1 North Korea	3.26
2 Afghanistan	23.18
3 Somalia	43.11
4 Sudan	36.90
5 Pakistan	5.96
6 Eritrea	2.66
7 Libya	2.28
8 Iraq	5.58
9 Yemen	7.50
10 Iran	0.14
11 India	15.15
12 Saudi Arabia	Ineligible for ODA
13 Maldives	-
14 Nigeria	10.85
15 Syria	34.50
16 Uzbekistan	0.01
17 Egypt	1.93
18 Vietnam	75.65
19 Turkmenistan	0.00
20 Laos	2.40
21 Jordan	5.49
22 Tajikistan	0.03
23 Malaysia	0.01
24 Myanmar	7.22
25 Nepal	2.56
26 Brunei	Ineligible for ODA
27 Qatar	Ineligible for ODA
28 Kazakhstan	0.05
29 Ethiopia	210.61
30 Tunisia	0.06
31 Turkey	7.30
32 Kenya	46.68
33 Bhutan	-
34 Kuwait	Ineligible for ODA
35 Central African Republic	23.80
36 Palestinian Territories	50.06
37 Mali	7.61
38 Indonesia	0.14
39 Mexico	0.24
40 United Arab Emirates	Ineligible for ODA
41 Bangladesh	8.09
42 Algeria	0.28
43 China	0.16

Country	€ millions
44 Sri Lanka	0.98
45 Azerbaijan	0.01
46 Oman	Ineligible for ODA
47 Mauritania	1.87
48 Bahrain	Ineligible for ODA
49 Colombia	5.47
50 Djibouti	0.32

Excise Duties Yield

55. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue generated from the sale of petrol and white diesel in each of the years 2014 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2195/18]

56. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance the excise generated, either actual or estimated, from non-commercial vehicles for petrol and diesel for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2209/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 56 together.

I am advised by Revenue that information regarding Excise receipts and carbon tax from the sale of petrol and diesel for the years 2014 to 2016 is published on the Revenue statistics website at: www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/excise/receipts-volume-and-proce/excise-receipts-commodity.aspx.

As VAT returns do not require the yield from a particular activity or product to be separately identified, the VAT generated from the sale of motor fuel to non taxable persons cannot be identified from Revenue data. However an estimate of the VAT revenue generated from the sale of petrol and white diesel is provided in the following table.

Estimated VAT Yield €m		
Year	Petrol	Diesel
2014	423	154
2015	364	166
2016	319	177

Regarding Question 2209/18, I am advised by Revenue that Excise returns do not provide for a breakdown of receipts from different vehicle types. The information is therefore not available to Revenue to provide an estimate of the Excise generated from the sale of petrol and diesel to non commercial vehicles alone.

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

57. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the previous employment record that staff at head of division and head of function level in the Central Bank held at Irish financial institutions, in tabular form; the guidelines in place to prevent conflicts of interest in dealing with a former employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2211/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It was not possible for the Central Bank

of Ireland to provide the information sought in the time available and, therefore, I will make arrangements to provide the information in line with Standing Orders.

Financial Services Regulation

58. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the procedures in place regarding cross-jurisdictional reporting and sharing of information by financial institutions on matters of fraud; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2212/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Primary responsibility for investigation of fraud, and consequent sharing of information, rests with An Garda Síochána, and is therefore a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The Revenue Commissioners and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) play a role in cross-jurisdictional information sharing in matters of fraud by financial institutions, as outlined below.

In terms of information sharing related to tax fraud by financial institutions, the Revenue Commissioners share information in a number of ways. Exchange of information (EOI) is the cross-border sharing of taxpayer information by tax administrations. A tax administration may ask for specific information on a particular case from another jurisdiction. When this happens, it is known as EOI on request. Alternatively, a jurisdiction may freely offer information it believes to be of interest to another tax authority. This voluntary sharing is known as spontaneous EOI. Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) is the exchange of information between countries without having to request it. AEOI exists to reduce global tax evasion.

Ireland has implemented the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) which provides for the automatic exchange of financial account information between tax authorities. The first information exchange began in September 2017.

Financial institutions, for the purpose of the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and CRS, include banks, investment traders, fund management companies and trust managers. Credit Unions are considered financial institutions for CRS but not for FATCA.

Revenue has published a detailed guide to exchange of information, available at the following link: www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-35/35-01-01a.pdf.

The Companies Act, 2014 includes provisions for the sharing of information in specified circumstances with appropriate investigative and supervisory authorities both domestically and in other jurisdictions. This includes, for example, the power to share information with the Revenue Commissioners and the Central Bank. The ODCE has in place a number of Memoranda of Understanding with relevant bodies in Ireland which outline the arrangements for information sharing and other cooperation.

Further queries in relation to the ODCE or the Companies Act should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

59. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number, nature and results of investigations carried out by the Central Bank into the mis-selling of hedge fund products by

financial institutions here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2213/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that, to date, it has not undertaken an investigation into the sale of hedge fund products by financial institutions in the State.

As per Central Bank rules, Hedge Funds authorised in Ireland (known as “Qualifying Investor Alternative Investment Funds” – QIAIFs) can only accept subscriptions from investors who:

- Are professional clients as defined in MiFID; or
- Are investors who have the appropriate expertise, experience and knowledge to understand the proposed investment.

QIAIFs shall not accept subscriptions of less than €100,000 from individual investors. An exemption from the minimum subscription requirement of €100,000 is granted to certain categories of investors as set out in the Central Bank’s AIF Rulebook (available at the following link: [www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/Regulation/industry-market-sectors/funds-service-providers/aifm/AIFM/aif-rulebook-march-2017-\(002\).pdf](http://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/Regulation/industry-market-sectors/funds-service-providers/aifm/AIFM/aif-rulebook-march-2017-(002).pdf)). The QIAIF must ensure that such investors self-certify that they are availing of the exemption provided for and that they are aware that the QIAIF is normally marketed solely to qualifying investors who are subject to a minimum subscription of €100,000.

When selling financial services products, regulated entities are subject to the conduct of business rules as set out in the European Union (Markets in Financial Instruments) Regulations 2017 (MiFID II), or the Consumer Protection Code 2012, where appropriate.

Tax Data

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the year one and full-year cost for every 1% reduction in capital gains tax and capital acquisitions tax, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2254/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated cost of a 1 per cent reduction in Capital Gains Tax (CGT) and Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) is as shown in the ready reckoner published at www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx.

These show a full year cost of €14m for every 1% reduction in CAT and €34m for the same reduction in the CGT. The first year cost is estimated at €12 million for CAT and €31 million for CGT, both assuming the reduced rate is introduced at the start of the tax year. It should be noted that these costs assume no behavioural change.

Household Debt Statistics

61. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance the figures available that measure the level of credit card debt to household income; if so, if he will provide same for each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2274/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has been able to provide me with the following available data on new spending during the year on personal credit

cards:

2015: €8.2 billion

2016: €8.3 billion

2017 to Nov: €7.8 billion

I understand that further information on credit card numbers, sector of spend, and debit card spend and card numbers are available from the Credit and Banking Statistics, Credit and Debit card statistics webpage. Data are available in this format, on a monthly basis, from 2015 onwards.

I should also point out that the Consumer Protection Code 2012 requires that “A regulated entity must gather and record sufficient information from the consumer prior to offering, recommending, arranging or providing a product or service appropriate to that consumer.” This includes the consumer’s income where relevant.

As it happens, this question is fortuitously timed because next week will see the launch of a public awareness campaign by my Department, aimed specifically at raising awareness and encouraging people to consider switching credit cards. The Deputy may recall the first phase of the switching campaign which also targeted current accounts and mortgages.

The campaign will make it clear to consumers that switching credit card is easy and encourage them to visit the www.switchyourbank.ie website for further information and comparisons of credit cards available in the Irish market. This whole campaign is funded by contributions from AIB and PTSB as a condition of the approval of their restructuring plans by the EU Commission and there is no cost to the taxpayer.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

62. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the key priorities of his Department in regard to the forthcoming capital review; the projects it has submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of his negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2290/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): For the purposes of the capital review the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform looks at the Finance Vote Group. There are 4 Votes in the Finance Group: The Department of Finance, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, and the Tax Appeals Commission.

Following the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, the Department of Finance Vote Group has been allocated €91 million in capital expenditure over 2018-2021. A small proportion of this is to be allocated to the Department of Finance to provide for IT equipment, IT systems, and to ensure appropriate facilities are in place for staff of the Department. The vast majority of the allocation will be allocated to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

This additional capital funding will enable the Office of the Revenue Commissioners to deliver further IT Development (PAYE Modernisation). The project represents the most significant reform of the administration of the PAYE system in over fifty years. The objective of the project is that employers, employees and Revenue will all have access to the most accurate and up-to-date information available relating to pay, tax, PRSI and USC deductions. This will ensure that the right amount is collected at the right time from employees, and that employers

pay their correct liabilities when required.

I am satisfied with the current status of the negotiated allocation for the Finance Vote Group.

Departmental Data

63. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of both complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2316/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department takes any claims of bullying and/or harassment very seriously and any such claim are dealt with under the Dignity At Work policy. The Department had 1 claim of bullying and/or harassment made between 2011 and 2017. This case underwent independent investigation however the result is confidential.

The Department has provided copies of the Dignity at Work policy to all staff and it also given to new staff at Induction. The policy on bullying and harassment is also included in the Staff Handbook which is provided to all staff. All of these documents are also available on the Department's internal HR website.

In 2017, the Department arranged a Dignity at Work presentation which was provided by the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service and has circulated a pamphlet on the new Disciplinary Code to all staff.

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has had engagement with the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement as part of the tracker mortgage scandal regarding possible breaches of the Companies Acts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2354/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank's regulatory mandate is to ensure the proper and effective regulation of financial institutions and markets, while ensuring that the best interests of consumers of financial services are protected. The tracker mortgage examination is being conducted by the Central Bank pursuant to this statutory mandate with a view in particular to ensuring the interests of consumers are protected and that regulated entities and individuals are held to account, as appropriate, for any regulatory failings.

The Central Bank has advised that if it identifies information in the course of its work that leads it to suspect a breach of the Companies Acts has been committed it is required to make a report to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE). The Central Bank takes these obligations very seriously. To date, the Central Bank has not had any contact with the ODCE with regard to the tracker mortgage examination. The Central Bank is currently conducting enforcement investigations related to the tracker mortgage investigation. It is keeping its reporting obligations to the ODCE under review and any reports will be made as appropriate.

VAT Rebates

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have discretion to approve a refund of VAT beyond the existing four year time limit in respect of VAT refunds on aids and appliances used by persons with disabilities and in which extenuating circumstances apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2357/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that section 99(4) of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act, 2010 provides that a claim for a refund of VAT must be made within four years after the end of the taxable period to which it relates. Section 99(6) of the Act prohibits Revenue from refunding any amount of tax except as provided for in the legislation; therefore there is no discretion to approve a refund claim that is outside the four year time limit even where extenuating circumstances may exist.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

66. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his Department's position on the provision of pension entitlements to employees such as community employment personnel who have their entire salary provided by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2180/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): An issue which has been under discussion by the Community Sector High Level Forum relates to community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors who have been seeking, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme.

At the April meeting of the Forum, my Department outlined its intention to conduct a detailed scoping exercise in order to comprehensively examine and assess the full potential implications of the issues under consideration. In considering the particular matter referred to, regard must be had to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

A meeting of the Forum took place on Thursday, 23 November 2017 where the findings of the scoping exercise were shared with members of the Forum. A follow up meeting to deal with technical questions arising from the exercise took place on Friday, 15 December 2017.

Office of Public Works

67. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a location (details supplied) in County Cork falls within the remit of the Office of Public Works for funding of works to trees which are dangerous and need to be removed. [2187/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The risk of trees falling into the Gouldshill Stream which forms part of the Mallow Flood Relief Scheme, and which could potentially cause an obstruction to the channel, comes within the maintenance remit for the Scheme. The Office of Public Works (OPW)

consequently has responsibility for the removal of such debris under the Scheme's maintenance programme to prevent a likely increased risk of flooding. I am advised that Cork County Council has arranged to have the trees in question inspected. However, the trees are the property of the owners on whose lands they are situated, so the risk of any trees falling onto any property would be a matter for the property owners themselves to address.

State Properties

68. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 91 of 23 November 2017, the position regarding lands at a location (details supplied) for which Fingal County Council has sought a deed of waiver in order to transfer the land to Fingal County Council ownership; the timeframe for his Department to make a decision and respond to the council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2250/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Under section 28(2) of the State Property Act, 1954, land vested in or held in trust for a body corporate immediately prior to its dissolution, (other than land held by such body in trust for another person) becomes property of the State in the person of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The interest acquired by the Minister is described as a defeasible interest as it may be defeated by restoration of the company up to 20 years after dissolution.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has the discretion, under section 31 of the State Property Act 1954, to waive property that has devolved to the State under section 28, if he believes it is proper to do so having regard to all the circumstances of the case.

I can confirm that an application for waiver of this property has been made by Fingal County Council since my reply to your previous parliamentary question on 23 November 2017. A response to Fingal County Council will issue shortly outlining any additional requirements before a full consideration of the waiver application can be made.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

69. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his key priorities in regard to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2295/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As outlined to the Deputy in my response to his previous parliamentary question on this matter, the capital review was published on 14 September 2017 and I believe that all members of the Oireachtas received a hard copy on that date. To recap, the review of the Capital Plan highlighted some key themes which will closely inform and be incorporated into the analysis leading to the finalisation of the new ten-year plan for public capital investment 2018-2027. These themes include:-

- confirmation of the central role of public capital investment in underpinning the economy's long-term growth potential and addressing overheating risks as well as supporting social progress;

- the need to align public capital investment priorities to a changing demographic profile;

- the critical importance of public capital infrastructure in meeting the essential requirement for balanced regional growth and promoting the societal transformation required to achieve

climate action objectives;

- the mechanisms through which public investment can strengthen the economy's resilience to major risks such as Brexit;

- the central importance of robust mechanisms to support the efficiency and value for money of public capital investment; and

- the strong business case for ensuring that public capital spending is balanced between new projects and maintaining the quality and capacity of existing public capital infrastructure.

Based on the analysis, the review of the capital plan identified a number of key sectors as priorities for investment, including transport, education, housing and health. The findings of the review assisted Government in selecting priorities for the allocation of the additional €4.3 billion capital expenditure allocated in Budget 2018 over the period to 2021.

Consequently, between 2014 and 2021, public capital expenditure in Ireland will have more than doubled and as set out by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will see public investment in Ireland moving to among the highest in the EU. Capital expenditure is projected to reach €8.4 billion in 2021 which is equivalent to 3.8% of GNI*.

The new ten-year capital plan is currently being finalised. I can, however, confirm that the plan will set out the Government's priorities in relation to public capital investment beyond 2021 and it is my objective that the plan will demonstrate the Government's commitment to remaining amongst the highest investors in public capital investment in the EU over the period 2022 to 2027.

Public investment over the period 2018 – 2027 will be a key factor in delivering on the objectives of the new National Planning Framework (NPF) detailed in the Ireland 2040 Plan, which sets out a new model and approach to spatial planning in Ireland. The lack of progress in implementing the National Spatial Strategy launched in December 2002 resulted, in part, from a failure to ensure that our public investment plans were strictly aligned with delivering the spatial planning objectives. The investment plans which will be set out in the new 10-year capital plan will clearly demonstrate how public investment will help deliver the Strategic Outcomes detailed in the Ireland 2040 Plan.

Departmental Data

70. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2321/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since 2011, one complaint of sexual harassment has been lodged within my Department and I can advise the Deputy that my Department's policy is that all complaints of bullying or sexual harassment are fully investigated by qualified investigators. The Department does not comment on individual cases and all parties are advised and assured of the importance of confidentiality in such matters.

The Civil Service is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation and its Dignity at Work Policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the work-

place. A key aim of the Policy is to provide awareness regarding the steps which individuals may take if they believe that they have been bullied, harassed, or sexually harassed. All policies are communicated to staff at induction and are accessible on line.

Third Level Fees

71. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the level of third level education fees generated in each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2275/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As requested by the Deputy, the overall income generated from fees for Higher Education Institutes including Universities, Institutes of Technology and specialist colleges is listed in the following table (as reported in the accounts).

Please note that 2015/16 and 2016/17 data is partially estimated, as final certified accounts are not currently available for all institutions.

Year	Total
2010/11	€ 947,676,501
2011/12	€ 986,672,906
2012/13	€ 1,011,900,103
2013/14	€ 1,072,217,729
2014/15	€ 1,095,418,188
2015/16*	€ 1,145,297,388
2016/17*	€ 1,168,033,566

*Partially estimated as certified accounts are not currently available for all institutes.

Apprenticeship Programmes

72. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons registered on newly developed apprenticeship programmes at the end of 2017. [2168/18]

73. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship programmes introduced in 2017. [2169/18]

74. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the apprenticeship population at the end of 2017. [2170/18]

75. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship registrations in 2017. [2171/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 to 75, inclusive, together.

We have launched plans to significantly increase the number of apprenticeships by expanding the apprenticeship model into new sectors of the economy with an overall target to more than double the number of apprenticeships available by 2020.

Some 4,843 new apprentices registered on an apprenticeship programme during 2017, of

which 335 were registered on one of the new consortia led apprenticeships. Seven new apprenticeship programmes got underway in 2017 bringing the total new apprenticeships to nine, with further new programmes to get underway in the coming months, including two ICT programmes that have already passed validation by QQI. The apprenticeship population was 12,849 at the end of 2017, of which 391 related to the new consortia led apprenticeships.

Schools Building Projects Status

76. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2183/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project for the school referred to by the Deputy, will comprise of a new two storey 8 classroom primary school at the existing site.

A Design Team was appointed in June 2017 and the project commenced Stage 1 of the Architectural Planning Process. Stage 1 is the Preliminary Design Stage where the Design Team in conjunction with the school authorities will analyse all the constraints of the site, develop a preferred design option and ensure that this is the best option for the delivery of the brief.

Once the Stage 1 submission has been received and reviewed by my Department a meeting will be arranged with the school authorities and the Design Team to review and progress the design proposals.

The project will be progressed through the normal stages of architectural planning and it will be a matter for the school and its design team to expedite the progression of the design through those stages.

Schools Building Contractors

77. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an updated report on the building programme at a school (details supplied) will be provided; the actions being taken in respect of issues of concern to the local community which have been the subject of contacts with the architects and builders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2189/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The contractor and design team on the project referred to by the Deputy met with the local residents last week to listen to their concerns.

They assured the residents that the works on site are fully in accordance with the planning consent granted by South Dublin County Council in respect of the design, height and location of the building.

Restrictions on both noise and working hours were stipulated in the conditions set out in the planning permission. The contractor has undertaken to continue to monitor and comply with these conditions.

The concerns of the local residents were noted and the contractor and the design team will review these concerns and look to mitigate noise levels to the greatest possible extent.

Schools Refurbishment

78. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the refurbishment of a school (details supplied); when works will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2236/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that my Department granted funding to the school in question for roof works under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017). I understand that this project was completed in December 2017.

My Department has no record of receiving any further correspondence from the school.

Schools Refurbishment

79. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the refurbishment of a school (details supplied); when works will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2237/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The appointment of the Design Team for the major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is currently at an advanced stage.

Officials from my Department have been in regular contact directly with the Board of Management and have outlined the steps in the Design Team appointment process.

Schools Refurbishment

80. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the refurbishment of a school (details supplied); when works will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2238/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The appointment of the Design Team for the major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is currently at an advanced stage.

Officials from my Department have been in regular contact directly with the Board of Management and have outlined the steps in the Design Team appointment process.

Schools Site Acquisitions

81. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a permanent site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2239/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in the Department's 6 year construction programme. Officials in the Department continue to liaise with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the acquisition of a suitable location for the school.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

82. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2288/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A 10 Year Public Capital Investment Plan is currently under development, led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This 10 Year Plan will ensure that capital resources support implementation of Ireland 2040, the new National Planning Framework, which is also being finalised, and which will set out a new approach to spatial planning in Ireland.

My Department is in ongoing discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the education sector priorities which might be included in the 10 Year Plan.

I will continue to highlight why investment in Education is central to the Government's aim to build a strong economy and a fair society.

Departmental Data

83. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2314/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Civil Servants are obliged to comply with the terms of the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour. On entry to my Department as an employee they are presented with a copy of the Code and they are required to certify in writing that they have received a copy and read its content.

At section 12 of the Code it addresses the matter of relations with colleagues in the workplace and they are expected to ensure that their behavior towards their colleagues is appropriate and to support the Civil Service Policy on harassment sexual harassment and bullying. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has published a revised policy document entitled "Dignity at Work" and it provides an avenue for staff that feel they have been subjected to bullying or harassment to report the matter.

Since 2011 my Department received 2 complaints where a staff member alleged they have been bullied. These cases were investigated and in both cases the investigators concluded that bullying had not taken place.

Schools Refurbishment

84. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the refurbishment and provision of a permanent extension for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2355/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a

building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

The project brief is being finalised with a view to progressing the project into architectural planning.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

85. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a request for a meeting. [2326/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This tragic case was considered under the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The recommendation made by the IRM was that no further action should be taken at that time. Counsel pointed out that the appropriate forum for raising matters related to alleged Garda failings was the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) who were already investigating certain matters arising from the tragic death in this case.

GSOC is an independent body tasked with the investigation of complaints against members of the Garda Síochána. That independence is crucial to confidence in the process of investigating such complaints. Therefore, it is a matter entirely for GSOC as to how it carries out its investigations and it would be entirely inappropriate for me, as Minister, to comment on any current GSOC investigation.

I am aware that GSOC met with members of the family in question last September and my understanding is they were given a full update on the current position with regard to the investigation of their complaints.

A commitment was given by the former Taoiseach that when the GSOC investigation is completed and the final report is to hand the question of whether, and if so, what further action can be taken, will be considered. That remains the position. In the circumstances I do not believe that a meeting at this stage would serve any useful purpose.

Garda Investigations

86. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been progress in relation to the need for a full and comprehensive investigation into the bombing in Belturbet in December 1972 which caused the death of two young persons and injuries to many others; the level of co-operation with the Northern Irish and British authorities in relation to a thorough and full investigation into this atrocity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2136/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The bomb attack in Belturbet, Co. Cavan in December 1972 was an appalling atrocity and I extend my sympathies to those who were bereaved and injured in that terrible attack.

At the time of this tragic incident a full investigation was conducted by An Garda Síochána which involved close liaison with the authorities in Northern Ireland. I am informed by the Garda Authorities that every possible avenue of inquiry was pursued at the time but, regrettably, it has not proved possible to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the investigation into these murders remain

open. It must be said that, with the passage of over forty years and no new evidence emerging, one must be cautious as to the prospect of bringing a successful prosecution. Nonetheless, the Garda Authorities will pursue fully any new information or evidence that becomes available to them and would work with the PSNI to seek to progress the investigation if that is at all possible. I would call on anyone with any relevant information about this atrocity to bring it to the attention of An Garda Síochána.

It is the case that dealing with the legacy of the troubles on this island is a difficult and complex task. In the Stormont House Agreement a series of useful measures were agreed to put in place an overarching framework in this regard, including mechanisms to provide the families of victims with more information about the deaths of their loved ones where that is possible. The Government remains fully committed to the implementation of those measures and we will continue to work with the British Government and the parties in Northern Ireland to give effect to them as soon as possible.

Residency Permits

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the history of stamp 4 held by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2153/18]

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 made an application for a residence card on 05 January 2015 under the EC Free Movement of Persons Regulations 2015. On 28 January 2015, INIS granted the person temporary permission to reside in this State, under Stamp 4 conditions, expiring on 04 August 2015, pending consideration of the application.

I understand that the person concerned did not meet the requirements of the Regulations. I am further informed that INIS, as an exceptional measure, granted permission to remain in this State for one year under Stamp 4 conditions on 13 July 2015. INIS also informed the person that the permission to remain may be renewed by the local Immigration Officer subject to compliance with specified conditions. I am further informed that permission to remain, under Stamp 4 conditions, has been extended, until 13 July 2018.

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.

Crime Data

88. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken by An Garda Síochána to enable the resumption of publication by the CSO of quarterly crime statistics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2197/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the work carried out by An Garda Síochána and I as Minister have no role in the matter referred to.

However, I understand that work is on going, between An Garda Síochána and the Central Statistics Office, to ensure that the publication of the official CSO crime statistics can recommence. The CSO has postponed the publication of crime statistics pending the receipt of certain clarifications arising from a Garda review of the classification of different categories of homicide.

My Department continues to liaise with both the CSO and An Garda Síochána in order to ensure that the issues preventing the publication of crime statistics continue to receive appropriate attention and are prioritised.

While recent provisional operational figures from An Garda Síochána would appear to indicate that certain crime categories are on the rise, I was pleased to note a Garda press release last week which stated that, according to provisional operational figures, burglaries nationally fell by 23% during November and December under the Winter Phase of Operation Thor.

However, until such time as the CSO can resume its publication of the crime statistics, it would be unwise to draw any firm conclusions from them at this point. Needless to say, An Garda Síochána will continue to monitor all new and emerging crime trends and deploy their resources accordingly.

Crime Data

89. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which each of the six recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate report on crime investigation 2014 directly related to the compilation of crime statistics has been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2198/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Following the publication of the Garda Inspectorate ‘Crime Investigation’ report in late 2014, my predecessor as Minister for Justice and Equality asked the Central Statistics Office to chair an Expert Group to examine each of the six recommendations relevant to them. The Expert Group consisted of officials from the CSO, An Garda Síochána and my Department, as well as Dr. Mary Rogan of Trinity College Dublin.

The Expert Group began its considerations in 2015 and a final report was published by my Department in July 2017. The report outlines the discussions and conclusions of the Group in relation to each of the six recommendations.

I am advised by the CSO that it continues to engage with An Garda Síochána in relation to a number of actions outlined in the report, including:

- Work on a new public facing document to explain to users of crime statistics the rules governing the recording and counting of crime incidents in Ireland. This document will include detail on recording, classification, invalidation, reclassification, counting rules and detection rules.

- A revised Memorandum of Understanding between the CSO and An Garda Síochána to guarantee the CSO access to both crime and non-crime data was signed in 2017. The CSO also receives technical documentation regarding updates, which affect how crimes are recorded.

- The CSO continues to examine PULSE data in order to improve the quality of crime data recording and inform users about related concerns. The CSO engages with An Garda Síochána via its High Level Liaison Group to outline and discuss data quality concerns.

- The CSO has outlined to An Garda Síochána its data requirements for a detailed assessment of PULSE data quality which will be carried out during 2018, based on incident and associated data reported during 2017.

Some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021. This major investment will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime and will facilitate progress on important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation, including those relevant to the compilation of crime statistics.

Commissions of Inquiry

90. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to open a commission of investigation into matters surrounding a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that a number of their victims have made claims alleging that several State agencies failed in their duty of care to them; and if he will meet with these persons in this regard. [2205/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that when this Government decided, in May 2017, to announce the intention to establish the Commission, this was based on legal advice from the then Attorney General that indicated there would be severe delays if the Commission were to be established at that time. This decision was communicated directly to the lawyers for victims involved at the time.

The decision was made based on a number of outstanding legal matters, including ongoing investigations into further offences, and a concern that evidence, adduced at a Commission, may impact upon future prosecutions.

I am advised that criminal investigations are ongoing in respect of a number of such cases and files have been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions in relation to several cases and directions are awaited. The DPP, of course, operates independently of Government

However, I have had a preliminary discussion with the Attorney General last week regarding this matter and have arranged to work with officials from the Attorney General's Office to try to identify a methodology to allow for the early establishment of the Commission of Investigation, in such a way as not to prejudice the ongoing criminal investigations.

I am acutely aware of the pain and suffering that has been endured by the victims. Once a clear, workable, legally sound path to the establishment of the Commission is agreed with the Attorney General's Office, I will meet with the victims, and their legal representative, at the earliest possible opportunity to brief them on the new proposals and to hear their thoughts.

Tribunals of Inquiry

91. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 256 to 259, inclusive, and 284 of 5 December 2017, if he has received the full report he requested from the Acting Commissioner; the reason this section 41 report was forwarded to the Attorney General; if the initial report he received under section 41 and the report he subsequently requested from the acting Commissioner will be published in the public interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2248/18]

92. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the ongoing role the disclosures tribunal co-ordination unit has; if an independent person to review the actions

of this unit will be appointed in view of recent reports received under section 41; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2249/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 and 92 together.

As the Deputy is aware the Garda Commissioner made a report to me under section 41(1) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 on 27 November last. The report forwarded a document that detailed concerns in relation to the operation of the Tribunal Co-ordination Office established within An Garda Síochána to meet its obligations to the Disclosures Tribunal.

This matter is something I treat with the utmost seriousness and in that regard I instructed that the contents of the report be referred to the Disclosures Tribunal. That was done on 29 November last. The report was also referred to the Office of the Attorney General in order to seek advice in relation to the matters contained in the document and the appropriate course of action.

I wrote to the Commissioner and requested a report under section 41(2) of the 2005 Garda Act 2005 addressing all of the issues raised in the document in so far as it relates to the Garda Síochána and the Commissioner's responsibilities. In late December, an initial report was forwarded to my Department where it is under consideration.

My Department is examining the document and the Commissioner's response to determine what further actions may be appropriate on foot of it.

As I have stated the Commissioner's report has been referred to the Disclosures Tribunal which is currently engaged in its work. If the Deputy has any concerns about any of these issues, the Tribunal has wide discretion and its terms of reference allow it to investigate contacts between members of An Garda Síochána and State entities in the course of its work. In this context, it is of course open to any person to bring matters to the attention of the Tribunal.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

93. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his key priorities in relation to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2294/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department is in ongoing engagement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in regard to the National Development Plan. Following the review of the existing Capital Plan, which was carried out during 2017, I was pleased to announce as part of Budget 2018 that an additional €157 million had been allocated for capital expenditure in the Justice Sector in the period 2018 to 2021. This will give rise to a total capital investment of circa €820 million in the Justice area over the next four years in relation to the Garda, Courts, Prisons and other key strategic areas such as Forensic Science Ireland. This funding will enable the completion of projects such as the new Forensic Science Laboratory, the development by the OPW of a new building to replace the current Garda DMR Headquarters in Harcourt Square and significant levels of investment in Garda ICT, Garda transport fleet and continued Garda station refurbishment. It is expected that the National Development Plan will reflect the requirement for continuing capital investment in the Justice Sector in period after 2021 given that an efficient and effective criminal justice system is vital to the realisation of the strategic outcomes of the Ireland 2040 Plan.

Questions - Written Answers
Bullying in the Workplace

94. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within his department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2320/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has an anti-bullying policy in place entitled Dignity at Work, an Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy for the Irish Civil Service to combat bullying and sexual harassment.

The total number of claims lodged are as follows:

Year	Number of claims	Number of claims investigated	Outcome of investigation
2011	2	2	Both claims not upheld
2012	2	2	One claim upheld, one not upheld
2013	Nil		
2014	Nil		
2015	1	1	Claim upheld
2016	Nil		
2017	1	1	Claim upheld

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

95. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her key priorities in relation to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2283/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): “Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021” was published in September 2015 by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on behalf of Government at that time.

This capital plan set out that an indicative amount of €3.01 billion in capital investments would be made through the Department’s Vote primarily through the enterprise agencies covering the period 2016 – 2021 inclusive.

The funding supports the jobs, enterprise development and innovation agendas and is, in the main, in the form of multi-annual capital grant supports to agency client companies and research and development investments made through Ireland’s higher education institutions.

A large portion of the enterprise agency grant supports are multi-annual in nature and typically span a three to seven year period across many thousands of client companies and associated projects. In addition a significant portion of the funding provided is through competitive calls on an annual or bi-annual basis.

The mid-term capital review process was completed in Spring of 2017. My Department

highlighted four main priority areas in our submission to the review;

- Delivering on the Government's Regionalisation Agenda;
- Transformational supports for indigenous enterprise to respond to Brexit challenges;
- Immediate ramping up of R&D investment in support of Government's science strategy "Innovation 2020";
- "Access to Finance" contingency funding packages over 2 years needed to support firms most at threat in the face of Brexit.

The four priority areas are primarily underpinned by the capital programmes of the enterprise agencies spanning across Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, Inter-Trade Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices. Other strategically important funding of relevance to the mid-term capital review included the Brexit Loan Scheme, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, Ireland's membership of various international research organisations, a successor to Cycle 5 of the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions, the Interreg programme, the National Standards Authority of Ireland and funding to the Tyndall National Institute. Some of these funded areas also involve significant private industry investment to grant awards as well as the utilisation of enterprise agency own resource income as part of enterprise development.

The mid-term capital review is now feeding in to the Government's proposed "National Development Plan" (NDP) which is to cover the period 2018 to 2027. The NDP is an ongoing process being co-ordinated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NDP will underpin the strategic outcomes which are to be set out in the forthcoming "National Planning Framework - Ireland 2040" (NPF), which is being overseen by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Over recent months my Department has been actively engaged in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the NDP to highlight the centrality of enterprise and innovation supports to Ireland's future economic development and to ensure sustainable employment growth.

My Department has emphasised the need to ensure sufficient multi-annual capital allocations are in place to support future economic development and job creation, particularly in a regional context and in light of the significant challenges posed by BREXIT and the evolving global foreign direct investment landscape.

Discussions are ongoing and it is anticipated that the NPF and NDP will be completed in the weeks ahead during the first quarter of 2018.

Bullying in the Workplace

96. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within her Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within her department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2309/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): During the period in question, one complaint was lodged in 2017 under Dignity at Work – the Civil

Service anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy. The complaint is the subject of an ongoing process and therefore it is not possible to state the outcome. Notwithstanding this, given the low number of complaints lodged during the period it would not be appropriate to disclose any outcome for risk of identifying the parties involved.

Dignity at Work is the Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment policy for the Irish Civil Service, was launched in 2015 and replaces *Positive Working Environment* which had been in place since September 2005. The policy has been circulated to all staff in my Department and has also been disseminated through the Department's Intranet as well as by a recent article in the Department's staff magazine. It aims to promote respect, dignity, safety and equality in the workplace.

The policy provides information on the steps which individuals may take if they believe that they have been bullied, harassed, or sexually harassed. It outlines the recommended procedures which should be followed by all parties to complaints regarding bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment.

My Department is committed to upholding the key aims of the policy and to providing a work environment free from any form of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment. All staff are expected to treat colleagues with respect and dignity at all times. Behaviour linked to bullying, harassment or sexual harassment is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any complaints or issues raised in this area are treated seriously, fairly and in strict confidence. Informal resolution and the use of mediation are strongly encouraged and explored before proceeding to formal investigation.

HIQA Reports

97. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the measures being taken by the HSE to address the issues at a service (details supplied) in particular the unit in a location identified by recent HIQA reports to ensure that all service users have appropriate care and protection and that all families are informed and satisfied with the changes proposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2138/18]

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 issues, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Provision

98. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive home help supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2141/18]

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.

Civil Registration Documentation

99. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount collected by year and category in each of the years 2014 to 31 December 2017 for the issuing of birth, marriage and death certificates; the location in which revenue that is collected for the issuing of certificates is lodged to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2154/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Civil Registration Service is operated by the Health Service Executive on behalf of the General Register Office under the aegis of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. I have referred your question to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to you.

Home Help Service

100. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding a name change for home help professionals which adequately reflects their qualifications and skills (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2155/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I can confirm that my Department did not object to any name changes proposed for Home Helps. I understand that agreement between the parties was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission on 10 January 2018, on various issues, including a new title for the grade. A time frame for the implementation of the provisions of the agreement will be determined between the parties.

Home Help Service Provision

101. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made to provide a home help to a person (details supplied). [2157/18]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

102. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the freestyle libre diabetes monitoring system available under the long term illness scheme. [2162/18]

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.

Nursing Home Services

103. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he will regulate for and ensure transparency regarding additional extra charges imposed by nursing homes on residents; the protections he will put in place regarding residents who are unable to participate in additional charges for activities by reason of their medical condition such as dementia, physical disability and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2173/18]

127. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if regulation is being sought to examine oversight of additional charges for daily activities applied by nursing homes when a person is incapable of taking part in activities charged under this premise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2280/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 127 together.

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *A Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost.

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living; and
- Laundry service.

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home. In determining the services covered by the NHSS it was considered very important that the care recipient and the taxpayer would be protected and would not end up paying for the same services twice. For this reason, medications and aids that are already prescribed for individuals under an existing scheme are not included in the services covered by the NHSS, as this would involve effectively paying twice for the same service.

Although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, such as social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing. In recognition of this, anyone in receipt of financial support under the NHSS retains at least 20% of their income. The minimum amount that is retained is the equivalent of 20% of the State Pension (Non-Contributory). An operator should not seek payment from residents for items which are covered by the NHSS, the medical card or any other existing scheme.

Part 7 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 stipulates that the registered provider of the nursing home must agree a contract in writing with each resident on their admission to the nursing home. This contract must include details of the services to be provided to that resident and the fees to be charged. Residents should never be charged fees which are not set out in the contract. The Department of Health and the HSE are not a party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and the private or voluntary nursing home.

Registered providers of nursing home care are obliged to provide an accessible and effective

complaints procedure. Concerns about additional charges should in the first instance be taken up with the nursing home provider. The Office of the Ombudsman can examine complaints about the actions of a range of public bodies and, from 24 August 2015, complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has already gone through the complaints procedure of the private nursing home concerned.

I have met with both Nursing Homes Ireland and Age Action to discuss this issue in detail. In order to improve the transparency of these additional charges, I outlined that a schedule of charges should be provided to potential residents on enquiry to an individual nursing home, rather than at the point of admission. Nursing Homes Ireland undertook to advise their members to do so. I have also recently met with the National Treatment Purchase Fund, the Office of the Ombudsman and HIQA to discuss this matter further.

I have asked the Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group established to oversee the implementation of certain recommendations contained in the 2015 Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme to also consider this matter and examine the options that might be available, as part of its ongoing work.

A small group of representatives from the Department of Health and the HSE are to preform an examination of the issue of additional charges in nursing homes. They will report their findings and recommendations to the Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group.

I am committed to ensuring that our older population are protected, that they get the care that they deserve, and that they have access to all of the information they need in order to be able to make an informed decision, especially at such a vulnerable stage in their lives.

Hospitals Building Programme

104. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when the proposed new community hospital will be built in Killarney, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2175/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

105. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for surgery at University Hospital Galway; and the expected timeframe in view of the fact that this person has been on the waiting list since June 2016. [2176/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Facilities

106. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when an external clinical risk assessment will be carried out at Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway, to allow the re-opening of a number of theatres which have remained closed for the past number of months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2177/18]

107. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective procedures which have been cancelled or delayed since the closure of a number of theatres at Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway, in September 2017; the number of elective procedures that have been undertaken in the private sector to alleviate the pressure of the backlog since the closure of the theatres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2178/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

108. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include the purchase of EpiPens, which are necessary for persons suffering from life-threatening allergies such as peanut allergies, under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2181/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Expenditure

109. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the funding being made available by his Department to the HSE under the fair deal scheme in respect of a hospital (details supplied) to put it on a par with other similar hospitals; and if his attention has been drawn to the funding deficit which threatens the future viability of this facility. [2182/18]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

110. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the weekly medical card income limits for persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2186/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive issues Income Guidelines to assist in determining entitlement to Medical Cards or GP Visit Cards. In revising the income guidelines, the HSE has regard to Government policy, increases in the consumer price index and to other issues which may be relevant.

There are no proposals currently to amend the current income guidelines for the granting of eligibility under the GMS Scheme.

Hospital Beds Data

111. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds that remain closed in university hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2199/18]

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

Hospital Facilities

112. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the specific new initiatives, additional resources or extra capacity that was sanctioned for Letterkenny university hospital in advance of the winter period; the additional staff, bed capacity and resources that was provided for to deal with the pressures which the hospital has been under for the past number of months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2202/18]

113. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the additional bed capacity provided in Letterkenny university hospital in each of the years 2012 to 2017; the additional staff that were sanctioned in order to meet the extra capacity for the same period; his views on the ongoing capacity problems experienced at the hospital; his plans to deal with the lack of bed capacity and staff shortages at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2203/18]

114. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health if studies or analysis of the future service needs and demands of Letterkenny university hospital catchment area has been conducted by either the HSE or his department in order to plan for the hospital's future capacity needs in an orderly fashion; his views on the overcrowding situation at the hospital; his further views on whether future strategic planning and additional and appropriate further investment is urgently needed at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2204/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 to 14, inclusive, together.

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

Special Educational Needs Expenditure

115. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the annual budget to an organisation (details supplied); his plans to increase funding to ensure its essential services are maintained and increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2210/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (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.

Home Help Service Provision

116. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if a review will be conducted of the allocation of home help hours to a person (details supplied) with a view to reinstating the additional three hours awarded after a hospital stay in September 2017, bringing the total hours to five per week; the way in which the approved agency failed to provide a replacement on the occasion on which the home help failed to attend from 15 November 2017; the reason the home help manager was unaware of this fact until the matter was raised via a representation in December 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2216/18]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

117. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed regarding speech and language therapy services in south County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2226/18]

118. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to be seen by the speech and language therapist in the south County Leitrim area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2227/18]

119. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the appointment of a second speech and language therapist for the south County Leitrim area to reduce the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2228/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117 to 119, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

120. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [2229/18]

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

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

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

121. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be allocated for the delivery of a general practitioner out-of-hours service for north County Wicklow in the HSE service plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2242/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I remain committed to the development of an improved GP out of hours service for North Wicklow which can provide the appropriate level of cover for the population of the area. The development of such a service will allow GPs to participate fully in the provision of an integrated healthcare system providing medical services that are appropriate, timely and effective, easily accessible and responsive to the needs of patients.

The HSE National Primary Care Division has undertaken a national review of current GP out of hours services and a final report is expected to be completed shortly. This report will make recommendations regarding the future provision of GP out of hours services. I remain committed to the development of an improved GP out of hours service for North Wicklow which can provide the appropriate level of cover for the population of the area. The development of such a service will allow GPs to participate fully in the provision of an integrated healthcare system providing medical services that are appropriate, timely and effective, easily accessible and responsive to the needs of patients.

The HSE National Primary Care Division has undertaken a national review of current GP out of hours services and a final report is expected to be completed shortly. This report will make recommendations regarding the future provision of GP out of hours services.

Cancer Services Funding

122. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be allocated to an organisation (details supplied) in County Wicklow in the HSE service plan; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [2243/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Section 39 of the Health Act 2004 makes provision for the HSE to provide assistance to bodies that provide services similar, or ancillary, to services that the HSE may provide.

Section 39 organisations provide a broad range of services and these are governed by Service Level Agreements with the HSE. Decisions on the provision of funding to these organisations is a matter for the HSE.

The HSE also operates a National Lottery funded scheme under which it provides grants to health agencies and other organisations. Details of the scheme are available on the HSE website at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/National-Lottery-Grants-2017/>.

General Practitioner Services

123. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the general practitioner service (details supplied) in Waterville, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2252/18]

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

Hospital Services

124. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if radiology and-or radiography services at University Hospital Kerry have been outsourced, either now or in the past five years; and if so, if the staff provided are also working for the HSE. [2253/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific issues raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Facilities

125. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed development of a renal unit at Tallaght Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2276/18]

126. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed development of a six-bed intensive care unit at Tallaght Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2277/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 126 together.

The Renal Dialysis Unit has attained planning permission and is currently at tender stage. The expansion of the Intensive Care Unit is currently at design stage.

Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 103.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

128. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2292/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Mid Term review of the Capital Plan was published by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on 13th September 2017.

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 preparing a new National Development Plan for the period 2018-2027, which is expected to be published alongside and in support of the forthcoming new National Planning Framework, to sustain national economic and social progress over the long term. As the Deputy knows, my priority is increasing capacity to improve access and I will shortly bring the capacity report to Government to feed into this process.

Medical Card Eligibility

129. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the HSE's policy on medical card holders over 70 years of age who have been bereaved where the resulting change in circumstances means they no longer qualify for a medical card in their own right; if special allowances made in terms of income are taken into consideration in view of the particular circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2299/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The *HSE Medical Card/GP Visit Card National Assessment Guidelines for People aged 70 years and Over* obliges that in the event of the death of a person covered who attains the over 70 medical card, the surviving spouse/ partner who is over the age of 70 years will retain the medical card for a period of three years providing that the death occurred on or after January 2009, that the surviving spouse/ partner was aged 70 or over at the time of death and that he or she remains within the relevant income limits for a couple that are relevant to the period when the applicant is being assessed. At the expiry of the three year period, he or she will be assessed under the single persons' income limits.

If the surviving spouse or partner is under 70 years he or she will be assessed in accordance with the General Medical Card/GP visit card scheme using the appropriate income limits.

Hospital Waiting Lists

130. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the long waiting times faced by transgender persons to access public endocrinology services here; the steps he will take to address these waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2300/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The NTPF publishes the Inpatient and Outpatient waiting list figures by specialty and hospital each month. This information is available on NTPF.ie. The most recent figures published by the NTPF for December 2017 indicates that there is a total of 41 people on the Inpatient/Daycase waiting list for Endocrinology and a total of 9,043 people on the Outpatient waiting list for Endocrinology. The Deputy may wish to note

that this data is extracted from the overall waiting list figures which does not differentiate transgender patients from other patients on the waiting list.

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2018 allocated €55 million for the National Treatment Purchase Fund in 2018. This significant increase in funding more than doubles their 2017 total allocation which was €20m.

The HSE and NTPF are working together to develop coherent and synergistic Waiting List Action Plans in 2018 with the objective of arranging the provision of treatment for patients across a range of inpatient/daycase and outpatient specialties and procedures. These initiatives will continue to focus on long-waiting patients and overall waiting list numbers.

The existing care pathway in Ireland generally begins with an approach by an individual to their GP. The GP may refer the person to the local Community Mental Health Team for support and a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria by psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist. A thorough assessment is a pre-requisite to commencing hormone suppressants in Ireland, in line with international best practice. This is to ensure that the correct path is being taken for the individual and to ensure co-morbid issues are identified and addressed.

Health Services Provision

131. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is appropriate to require transgender persons to seek a psychiatric diagnosis of gender dysphoria before they can seek endocrinology services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2301/18]

132. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to a query from a person (details supplied) on transgender health care needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2302/18]

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

The prevalence of transgender people in Ireland is difficult to estimate as there is no official collection of this data. The HSE, however, points to two significant sources in this respect.

The UK based Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) have estimated that 1% of individuals may experience some degree of gender variance or non-conformity and approximately 0.2% may undergo transition.

In a recent study, researchers from the Department of Endocrinology in St. Columcille's Hospital (SCH), Loughlinstown, Dublin reviewed the medical records of 218 patients and estimated prevalence of gender dysphoria at one in 10,154 male-to-female and one to 27,668 female-to-male individuals in the Irish population. These figures, however, only include individuals seeking medical services from that hospital and exclude those who are seeking treatment elsewhere or who do not medically transition.

A proposed model of care for transgender children, adolescents and adults was submitted by the HSE Quality Improvement Division to the HSE Divisions of Primary Care, Mental Health and Acute Hospital programme for consideration in January 2017. The model was developed in consultation with key treating clinicians, planners, policy makers, advocates and service users. The model outlines key services required to ensure the needs of the transgender population in-

cluding children and adolescents are addressed. It details current service provision and emerging service demand in relation to adults and separately in relation to children and adolescents. It draws on evidence based international best practice and aims to build on services which already exist and develop services where deficits prevail.

A number of initiatives are supported through the Social Inclusion Services including the development of the Gender Identity Skills Training Programme for Clinicians and professionals who work with children and young persons under the age of 18 years who are experiencing gender identity related issues to include General Practitioners, CAMHS Teams, Psychologists.

In response to your query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

133. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 143 of 8 November 2017, if the resources that are required have been identified in each hospital that does not have an early discharge team; his plans to recruit to fill these positions and establish teams; if locations have been identified to add extra teams in locations that already have teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2303/18]

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

Medical Records

134. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital from which a person has chosen to disengage is entitled to request the person's files from the hospital in which the person is now attending; if so, if the consent of the person is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2304/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The detailed circumstances pertaining to the individual case outlined by the Deputy are unclear. Where files are requested, data controllers should have careful regard to the nature of the request and the purpose for which the files are being requested. The rights of the patient regarding their personal health data and with whom that data can be disclosed should be of paramount importance in any consideration. Current data protection legislation clearly sets out strict rules regarding the processing of sensitive personal data (which includes data concerning health) by data controllers. Processing of personal data includes the collection, use and disclosure of data. A number of conditions are set out for the fair processing of sensitive data concerning health including consent and where such processing is necessary for a number of different reasons. These are detailed in Sections 2 A and B of the Data Protection Act 1988 (as amended). The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) takes effect on 25 May 2018 as the legal instrument for regulating the collection, use and disclosure of personal data.

Hospital Beds Data

135. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds in use on 11 January 2018 in each hospital; the bed capacity of each hospital if all bed spaces were fully available; the reason all spaces in hospitals are not being fully utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2305/18]

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

Hospital Beds Capacity

136. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he or his officials discussed the bed capacity review with the Minister for Finance or his officials in advance of budget 2018; the stage at which the bed capacity review was in October 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2306/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Capacity Review is examining health service capacity across all key areas of primary care, acute care and services for older people.

My Department had direct engagement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the terms of reference for the Review early last year. The emerging findings from the process have also been the subject of broader discussions with that Department in relation to health reform and future capital investment in the context of the mid-term review of both the current capital plan and the forthcoming ten year National Development Plan.

By October 2017, significant progress had been made on data collection, data analysis, and the development of baseline projections. A public stakeholder consultation process and detailed engagement with health system experts had been carried out and the International Peer Review Group had substantively validated the Review's approach and methodology. Sufficient progress had also been made on modelling the impact of potential policy and productivity changes over the projection period.

Work on the Health Service Capacity Review is now at an advanced stage. This Review will provide a basis for determining both the extent of capacity requirements over the next 15 years and the type of capacity needed. The findings will inform the development of a new 10 year national development plan.

I expect to receive the final report very shortly and I intend to bring the report to Government and have it published as soon as possible thereafter.

Vaccination Programme

137. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE only delivers flu vaccines to pharmacies on a fortnightly basis; his views on whether this is sufficient in view of the recent outbreak; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2307/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this PQ refers to a service issue regarding delivery of flu vaccines to pharmacies, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Data

138. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the

number of either type of complaint on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within his department to combat bullying and sexual harassment [2318/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health, like all Government Departments, is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation. In that regard, the Dignity at Work Policy has been developed in partnership between Civil Service management and staff unions through the Equality Sub Committee of General Council. It aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace. Every member of staff in my Department is aware that all forms of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment are unacceptable and every member of staff has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner.

There have been two sexual harassment claims lodged within my Department since 2011. One was lodged in 2015 and a resolution was mediated by HR locally. The second case was lodged in 2017 and an investigation is ongoing.

Hospital Appointments Status

139. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2327/18]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services

140. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when a roadmap for out-of-hours access to mental health services will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2356/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The 2017 Mental Health Division Operational Plan committed the Mental Health Division of the HSE to “Improving 7 day responses in Mental Health Services through increased capacity in Community Services”. The Division assigned a Service Improvement Lead to progress the initiative. The HSE has advised us that they 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 is currently approximately 60% coverage across the 9 Community Healthcare Organisations 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 service. As a result of this exercise €4.5 million was granted for the recruitment of staff, facilities and non-staffing costs associated with the enhanced Service which will initially be for known service users.

A consultation process with all 9 CHOs took place to agree staffing numbers and professions and the HSE is now in the process of recruiting the additional staff indicated. The HSE are also developing a more detailed model of care and set of key performance indicators to assess the value and impact of a 7/7 Service which they expect will inform the development of 24/7 Mental Health Services including Crisis Intervention.

The recruitment process for the additional staff has commenced and given the recruitment timelines the HSE expects that the enhanced 7/7 Services will commence on a phased basis from April/May this year.

Hospital Facilities

141. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health when the national review of the provision of catheterisation laboratories throughout the country, which was undertaken by the HSE, will be completed; when permission will be given to fund the fixed cardiac catheterisation laboratory service at Sligo University Hospital to serve the north-west region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2358/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS) programme has advised that it is preparing a report of the review of Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PPCI) and Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) centres, which looked at services and issues that need to be addressed to maintain the current services.

It might also be of interest to note that I have recently initiated a National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services, which has a much broader remit than the ACS review and will cover scheduled and unscheduled hospital-based services for the diagnosis and treatment of cardiac disease. The Steering Group for this National Review has now been established and the first meeting will occur on the 31 January 2018. It aims to report within 12-18 months. The needs of Sligo University Hospital will be considered in the context of this national review.

GLAS Payments

142. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2139/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015. Payments in respect of 2015 and the 2016 advance payment have been made.

An inspection of the GLAS actions was carried out which found an issue with one of the actions chosen. This issue has now been resolved. This case has now passed validations and the 2016 balance payment will issue shortly.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

143. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if licences will be renewed for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2150/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applications referred to by the Deputy are on behalf of Sneem Fishermen's Cooperative Society Ltd (which includes the individuals referred to by the Deputy).

The relevant sites are located within Kenmare Bay which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive (Natura 2000 site).

All applications in 'Natura' areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and/or Habitats Directives. An Appropriate Assessment has been carried out by the Marine Institute in respect of Kenmare Bay Special Area of Conservation. My Department has prepared an Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement which outlines how it is proposed to licence aquaculture in Kenmare Bay Special Area of Conservation in compliance with the Habitats Directive. This Conclusion Statement is available on the Department's website.

In addition to Natura requirements, under EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directives all licence applications must undergo an Environmental Impact Screening Assessment. This requires significant input from my Department's scientific and technical advisors. All applications, in compliance with the requirements of the applicable legislation, are advertised in order to facilitate public consultation, and submissions or observations received must be considered as part of the licence determination process.

While the Appropriate Assessment is carried out on a bay-wide basis, each licence application within the bay must be assessed individually.

Every effort is being made to expedite the determination of this aquaculture licence application having regard to all the complexities involved.

Forestry Data

144. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of hectares of private forestry in each county that his Department is funding (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2191/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department compiles a number of different afforestation statistics annually which are made available on my Department's website including statistics on the area of land planted in each county that is or has been in receipt of the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, or previous schemes.

While the statistics for a number of years are available on the website, a synopsis (in hectares) of the years 2007 to 2016 is outlined in the following table.

County	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Carlow	42.54	49.38	47.37	100.31	20.99	72.50	44.32	15.44	82.35	45.72
Cavan	299.86	197.23	260.28	242.66	204.22	171.16	210.06	240.93	276.77	425.07
Clare	668.56	695.41	563.53	521.22	484.08	480.31	347.38	419.67	567.90	552.00
Cork	1,024.44	1,006.06	798.51	1,157.34	1,035.41	1,040.88	672.05	690.45	662.95	608.08

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County	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Donegal	320.78	197.43	172.38	147.16	59.37	96.40	39.63	27.96	72.09	36.15
Dublin	17.72	10.90	0.00	0.00	1.28	19.96	0.00	12.10	8.42	2.75
Galway	403.31	234.76	318.39	561.29	299.53	336.31	418.54	386.69	431.73	331.14
Kerry	548.71	478.37	555.52	735.52	641.14	366.32	489.80	574.48	430.38	404.98
Kildare	78.51	17.09	111.09	86.23	101.34	185.75	47.79	89.51	28.62	13.49
Kilkenny	229.11	196.66	203.40	523.12	291.77	294.15	217.63	230.92	264.41	181.34
Laois	144.12	177.76	93.08	178.49	94.82	193.23	112.11	167.90	198.24	163.35
Leitrim	190.64	167.22	179.27	176.21	324.98	277.77	356.02	271.91	512.90	433.78
Limerick	372.58	440.74	329.44	410.75	380.89	281.43	242.57	122.05	176.81	328.80
Longford	123.55	85.83	87.11	242.59	173.78	177.86	255.32	225.13	286.15	272.01
Louth	55.23	65.27	65.13	46.30	19.39	51.05	26.21	0.00	22.39	39.84
Mayo	401.55	344.33	474.29	543.81	288.78	293.43	343.38	453.22	454.99	428.55
Meath	42.07	88.90	130.18	251.58	90.03	203.00	191.81	66.58	73.34	104.73
Monaghan	69.75	56.44	87.91	139.99	70.19	106.52	92.67	136.86	37.92	88.83
Offaly	135.15	242.04	323.68	279.13	268.43	263.07	174.35	127.51	156.26	135.76
Roscom- mon	309.03	315.23	370.10	360.16	288.00	251.73	431.17	448.78	334.35	435.04
Sligo	204.85	132.20	232.85	81.57	86.87	180.41	354.20	382.16	268.13	301.73
Tipperary	546.46	464.65	455.09	531.54	493.85	459.64	409.72	329.80	340.77	305.14
Waterford	310.01	155.72	245.21	264.36	203.98	128.19	137.85	121.64	125.29	240.13
Westmeath	140.92	145.11	199.61	202.80	250.81	271.37	241.36	236.40	204.14	281.48
Wexford	177.70	102.40	181.80	426.39	307.70	201.43	228.72	159.75	128.17	89.29
Wicklow	89.44	114.71	127.89	99.67	109.09	187.86	164.35	218.57	138.81	250.62
Total	6,946.59	6,181.84	6,613.11	8,310.19	6,590.72	6,591.73	6,249.01	6,156.41	6,284.28	6,499.80

Forestry Data

145. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of hectares of forestry owned by Coillte in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2192/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte is the State forestry company, which was established in 1989, pursuant to the Forestry Act 1988, at which time the bulk of the State's forest properties were vested in the company.

Coillte has provided the following table which shows lands owned or managed by Coillte, whether forested or not, by county:

County	Total Area (Hectares)
Carlow	3,781
Cavan	8,702
Clare	25,895
Cork	49,916
Donegal	42,165
Dublin	1,980
Galway	43,885
Kerry	21,549

County	Total Area (Hectares)
Kildare	3,884
Kilkenny	10,847
Laois	16,402
Leitrim	14,518
Limerick	13,592
Longford	3,386
Louth	1,705
Mayo	39,669
Meath	1,674
Monaghan	3,314
Offaly	9,715
Roscommon	10,436
Sligo	14,646
Tipperary	33,033
Waterford	19,477
Westmeath	5,344
Wexford	8,963
Wicklow	30,220
Total	438,698

I understand that Coillte's forest estate is divided into 321 different forest properties which are organised into six Business Area Units (BAUs), a map of which, showing the component counties, may be found on the company's website at <http://www.coillte.ie/our-forests/public-goods/forest-plans/>

Forestry Grants

146. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the value of afforestation premium that was paid nationally in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2193/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme is the main forestry scheme offered by my Department as one of a number of supports and land use options available to land owners. The Scheme guarantees premiums for 15 years and represents an attractive source of income for land owners.

In 2016 my Department processed applications for over 14,950 forestry premiums. The premiums paid totalled €72.94 million. These premiums make a significant contribution to the rural economy nationally.

Forestry Data

147. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of hectares of forestry in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2194/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department compiles a number of different afforestation statistics which are available on my Department's website including the National Forest Inventory Results Data which are an invaluable source of statistical information on Ireland's forest estate.

The area of forestry in each county is indicated in the table, which is taken from the National Forest Inventory.

County	Hectares'000
Carlow	8.4
Cavan	16.83
Clare	52.29
Cork	83.62
Donegal	56.34
Dublin	5.23
Galway	59.41
Kerry	53.17
Kildare	10.4
Kilkenny	19.02
Laois	25.26
Leitrim	26.5
Limerick	26.34
Longford	8.36
Louth	2.43
Mayo	51.73
Meath	12.5
Monaghan	5.6
Offaly	24.51
Roscommon	25.88
Sligo	20.58
Tipperary	47.85
Waterford	26.55
Westmeath	13.17
Wexford	13.83
Wicklow	35.86
Total	731.65

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

148. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if cows with four and five star rating that were born during or before 2013 and are moved from one herd to another for winter feeding and then back to their original herd after the winter months will be eligible for the beef data and genomics scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2206/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme provides for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improve-

ment of its environmental sustainability.

In situations where animals are moved from the herd temporarily for winter feeding purposes these animals will remain eligible provided that the movement is recorded on AIM as a feedlot movement and the animals are moved back to their original herd following the winter feeding.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

149. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will notify all persons in the beef data and genomics scheme of the cows that are and are not eligible for the scheme when sending the BDGP Eurostar report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2230/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation will shortly issue up to date Genomic Evaluations to all Participants in the BGDG. Scheme participants will be able to identify eligible and ineligible replacement animals from this report.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

150. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his key priorities in relation to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform regarding the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2282/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2018-2027 National Development Plan is currently in the process of being finalised. The plan, which will be published alongside the new National Planning Framework “Ireland 2040”, will set out the Government’s intentions in relation to public capital investment beyond 2021.

My priority is for the investment in the agri-food sector, through a well-funded Rural Development Programme, Seafood Development Programme and Forestry Programme, which will empower rural communities and underpin the sustainable growth the agri-food sector as set out in Food Wise 2025. Investment in the agri-food sector is required to improve competitiveness, to ensure the maintenance of Ireland’s landscape, improvements in biodiversity and water quality, to contribute to climate change goals and the development of our Fisheries Harbour Centres and research infrastructure.

In addition to specific public infrastructure projects, capital expenditure by my Department is largely comprised of demand-led multiannual investment programmes which support investments by large number operators in a range of projects across the agriculture, food and marine sectors. I expect this will continue to be the case and I have sought the inclusion in the new NDP of a number of programmes/projects including the following

- Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme
- Forestry Programme
- Remediation of Haulbowline Island
- National Food Innovation Hub

- Prepared Consumer Food Innovation Centre
- Investment in company innovation capacity
- Fisheries Harbour Centres
- Marine Institute and other research infrastructure.
- Seafood Development Programme

Bullying in the Workplace

151. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of complaints in each category on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2308/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Civil Service is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation and my Department implements the Civil Service wide anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy 'Dignity at Work'. I am satisfied that the policy is being implemented effectively throughout my Department. This policy came into effect on 20/2/2015, and replaced the previous policy called 'A Positive Working Environment' for all Civil Service employees, except for State Industrial employees, for whom the 'A Positive Working Environment – Anti-Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying Policy for State Industrial Employees' applies.

All staff in my Department are reminded annually of their responsibilities under the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, which includes the duty to show due respect for their colleagues at work and to abide by the Civil Service anti-bullying policy. Furthermore, all new recruits to my Department are required to familiarise themselves with both the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour and the Dignity at Work policy.

From time to time staff have raised a variety of issues regarding workplace difficulties. All issues raised are carefully considered under the Dignity at Work policy.

Since 2011, 18 cases of alleged workplace difficulties have been received by Human Resources Division. Of these 18 cases, 4 cases met the criteria for bullying as defined in the Dignity at Work policy and were investigated. Following investigations, two complaints were upheld and two complaints were not upheld.

Year	Number of Bullying Allegations received.
2011	2
2012	3
2013	1
2014	3
2015	1
2016	6
2017	2
2018	0

Mediation is recommended across the Civil Service as a mechanism to facilitate the resolution of workplace difficulties. Mediation attempts to create workable agreements between

parties to create a positive working environment for all. My Department actively promotes mediation at an early stage when workplace difficulties first arise.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

152. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the number of applications under the beef data and genomics programme II that have been disqualified from the scheme to date due to not having completed a carbon navigator; if this was as a result of an error by the applicant or the carbon navigator advisor in each case; if his Department will show leniency in cases in which the applicant is not at fault but stands to lose substantial income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2329/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme 2017 - 2022 provides for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability. As part of the scheme applicants must complete a carbon navigator with an approved advisor thereafter and provide data for an annual update to their carbon navigator. Where this Carbon Navigator is not completed, applicants will be removed from the Programme.

Of the 1,896 herdowners that initially applied to join BDGP II, there were 131 instances where a Carbon Navigator was not completed with an approved advisor. Completion of this involves making an appointment with an advisor and takes roughly 90 minutes to complete. The onus remains with the applicant at all times to ensure that this is completed. Where applicants feel they have grounds to appeal they may do so in writing to my Department.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

153. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to outline the timeframe for the roll-out of at least 30mb broadband speeds to a location (details supplied) in County Donegal as part of the national broadband plan; if such areas with poor or no broadband coverage will be prioritised during the roll-out phase as part of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2143/18]

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 deliver-

ing 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 a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

There are 42 premises in the townland of Ballybun. 10 (24%) fall within the AMBER area and will be covered under the State led Intervention. 32 (76%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be covered by commercial providers. Individuals can search the Map by eir-code/address to ascertain the broadband status for their specific premises.

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. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

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.

Sustainable Energy Communities Scheme

154. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a grant is available to assist a person (details supplied) to re-establish an independent electricity generating system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2149/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): At present there are a number grants available through the Better Energy Programme, administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland on behalf of my Department, which enable homeowners to choose renewable energy solutions. However, there are no supports or grants currently available to support domestic battery storage systems in Ireland. My Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which is being designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal which compared the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable technologies at various scales including micro-generation, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply.

Micro generation, which typically involves an element of self-consumption and storing or selling of excess electricity to the grid, was also appraised as part of the RESS economic as-

essment. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before a support scheme for micro generation can be developed.

I am committed to further exploring opportunities for supporting micro generation, as I believe that micro-generation could have an important role in Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy, in assisting Ireland meet its renewable electricity targets, and increasing social acceptance of and promoting renewable energy projects right across the country. In October 2017 my Department and SEAI hosted a workshop on micro generation which discussed a number of these challenges with relevant stakeholders and identified a number of potential options to incentivise greater uptake of micro generation in Ireland, including the linking of supports for micro generation and battery storage. Micro generation support policies will be developed further throughout 2018.

Domestic battery storage technology forms part of on-going research and development funded by the SEAI on behalf of my Department.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

155. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to outline the timeframe for the roll-out of at least 30mb broadband speeds to a location (details supplied) in County Donegal as part of the national broadband plan; if such areas with poor or no broadband coverage will be prioritised during the roll-out phase as part of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2151/18]

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 a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

The premises referred to by the Deputy is in an AMBER area.

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. This is the last stage of the

procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

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.

Air Pollution

156. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to geo-engineering activity, for example, stratospheric aerosol geo-engineering, being conducted here; if there are plans to commence such activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2152/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There is no stratospheric aerosol geo engineering being conducted here, and I am not aware of any plans to commence such activity, or to examine its feasibility. I would add that there is no credible information or evidence that the trails from aircraft passing over Ireland are anything other than normal contrails, the appearance of which is known to vary according to atmospheric conditions, and which have no observable impact on air quality or human health. These condensation trails (or 'contrails') are long thin artificial clouds that form behind aircraft and are visible from the ground.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

157. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national broadband plan formal procurement process has now been completed in respect of roll-out to a location (details supplied); the timeframe within which a broadband upgrade will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter [2220/18]

158. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national broadband plan formal procurement process has now been completed in respect of roll-out to a location (details supplied); the timeframe within which a broadband upgrade will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2221/18]

159. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national broadband plan formal procurement process has now been completed in respect of roll-out to a location (details supplied); the timeframe within which a broadband upgrade will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2222/18]

160. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national broadband plan formal procurement process has now been

completed in respect of roll-out to locations (details supplied); the timeframe within which a broadband upgrade will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2223/18]

161. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national broadband plan formal procurement process has now been completed in respect of roll-out to locations (details supplied); the timeframe within which a broadband upgrade will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2224/18]

162. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national broadband plan formal procurement process has now been completed in respect of roll-out to locations (details supplied); the timeframe within which a broadband upgrade will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2225/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 to 162, inclusive, together.

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 a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

The following table sets out the number of premises which fall into each category in the various townlands/areas referenced in the Questions. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises are in an AMBER, BLUE or LIGHT BLUE area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

Townland	Premises within the NBP Intervention Area: AMBER	Premises within Commercial Operator's Area: BLUE	Premises within eir's planned rural deployment: LIGHT BLUE
Bareen/Balraheen	9 (100%)		
Turnings			7 (100%)
Knockanally	40 (100%)		
Newtown	67 (26%)	187 (74%)	
Ballyoulster	2 (2%)	87 (98%)	

Townland	Premises within the NBP Intervention Area: AMBER	Premises within Commercial Operator's Area: BLUE	Premises within eir's planned rural deployment: LIGHT BLUE
Killeenlea	5 (21%)	16 (67%)	3 (13%)
Ballycaghan	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	48 (96%)*
Cappagh	56 (86%)	7 (11%)	2 (3%)
Killbrook	17 (40%)	25 (60%)	
Kilmore	44 (92%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)

*The Deputy referenced a particular premises by eircode which is located in this townland. The premises in question is in the LIGHT BLUE area.

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. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

My Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

In respect of eir's commitment to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas by end 2018, my Department confirmed eir had passed 101,000 as of September 2017. This includes 5,031 premises passed in Kildare alone since the start of the rollout.

Questions Nos.158 to 162, inclusive, answered with Question No. 157.

Environmental Investigations

163. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for local authorities or other agencies to obviate the impact of traffic pollution along the M50 corridor in which between 100,000 and 150,000 vehicles per day travel; his further plans with local authorities or other agencies to obviate the impact of noise pollution and the deteriorating air quality in communities along this corridor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2270/18]

164. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the recent measurements and monitoring that have taken place to measure the increase in traffic pollution, including air and noise along the M50 corridor; the dates the monitoring and measurements took place; the results of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2271/18]

165. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the statistics or reports that detail the effects of pollution on the general health of the population in terms of days at work lost through sick leave or otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2272/18]

166. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the annual estimated figures for the cost of pollution here and its effects on the general health of the population in terms of lost work days and sick days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2273/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163 to 166, inclusive, together.

The calculation of the health impacts of pollution is derived from large scale statistical analysis of pollutant loads and epidemiological studies. The European Environment Agency (EEA) publishes an annual report on Air Quality in Europe with estimates on health impacts. The latest report, covering the year 2014, was published in October last year and is available to download at the following link: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2017>

The report indicates that for 2014, there were approximately 1,510 premature deaths in Ireland that could be attributed to air pollution, and over 18,000 years of life lost. While this EEA report does not calculate a cost for this health impact, a 2015 World Health Organisation report (“Economic cost of the health impact of air pollution in Europe”) estimated a cost to Ireland of over US\$2.5 billion for the year 2010. Further information on the impact of air pollution across Europe is available from a Commission impact assessment (available at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/air/pdf/Impact_assessment_en.pdf) which indicates 121,378,612 lost working days across Europe arising from particulate matter pollution.

While the health statistics do not disaggregate the impact according to the source of pollution, we know that transport is an important contributor of pollutants, including PM2.5 and especially NOx. In relation to pollution along the M50, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) is currently undertaking indicative particulate monitoring and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) monitoring at two locations adjacent to the M50. The first monitoring station is located by the eastern quadrant of the N4/M50 interchange. The second monitoring station is located to the western quadrant of the Sandyford interchange. Monitoring commenced at both stations in February 2014. Both stations were established to monitor trends in emissions of PM10 and NO2 in the vicinity of the upgraded M50 Motorway as per modification 3(2) of the An Bord Pleanála decision to approve the scheme.

The measured concentrations of PM10 and PM2.5 at both monitoring stations are significantly below the limits set out within the Air Quality Standards Regulations (S.I. 180 of 2011). At the monitoring station established in the western quadrant of the Sandyford interchange, the measured NO2 concentrations are below the limits set out within the Air Quality Standards Regulations. At the monitoring station in the eastern quadrant of the N4/M50 interchange, six separate locations have been monitored. At five of these locations, the measured NO2 concentrations are below the limits set out within the Air Quality Standards Regulations. However, the annual average limit value has been exceeded at one roadside NO2 monitoring location.

In light of the health concerns arising from air pollution, my Department is working on the first ever National Clean Air Strategy which will provide an overarching policy framework within which clean air policies can be formulated and given effect in a manner consistent with national, EU and international policy considerations and priorities. The Clean Air Strategy will address priority air pollutants in Ireland, including vehicle emissions, in an integrated manner. I intend to launch the Strategy in the coming months.

I am also supporting the development and rollout of a new national Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) by the Environmental Protection Agency. The AAMP will double the number of ambient air quality monitoring stations in Ireland by 2022, and enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public.

In relation to noise, it should be noted that Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin County Councils operate a County Dublin Environmental Noise Information website which can be accessed at <http://dublin-noise.sonitussystems.com/calendar.php> . A number of monitors are situated close to the M50.

Motorways, including the M50, fall within the scope of EU Directive 2002/49/EC (the Environmental Noise Directive, or END), relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise. This Directive aims to provide “a common framework to avoid, prevent or reduce, on a prioritised basis, the harmful effects of exposure to environmental noise”. A key source of noise covered under the END is road traffic noise.

The Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 transpose the END into Irish law. The Regulations designate noise-mapping bodies and action planning authorities for the production of strategic noise maps and action plans. Primary responsibility for both noise mapping and action planning is assigned to local authorities. A number of other bodies also have noise mapping functions which are carried out on behalf of the local authorities concerned. Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII - formerly the NRA – National Roads Authority) is a designated noise mapping body under the 2006 regulations.

The regulations also designate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the national authority for the purposes of the regulations. The Agency’s role includes supervisory, advisory and coordination functions in relation to both noise mapping and action planning, as well as the reporting requirements for the purpose of the Directive.

The regulations set out a process for addressing environmental noise. Firstly, noise must be assessed through the preparation of strategic noise maps every 5 years for areas and infrastructure falling within defined criteria, e.g. large urban areas (referred to as agglomerations), major roads, railways and airports. The third round noise mapping process is almost complete and joined up maps for the four authorities in the Dublin agglomeration should be available in the coming weeks. These maps will present modelled noise levels within the Dublin agglomeration including along the M50.

A period of public consultation will be organised to make these noise maps available at relevant Local Authorities and other mapping bodies. Existing noise maps for the first and second round of the END are currently available on the EPA website and Local Authority websites.

Following on from the third round mapping process, Action Planning Authorities (including relevant Local Authorities) are required to prepare Noise Action Plans to address noise levels identified through the mapping process. The action plans are designed to act as a means of managing environmental noise by controlling future noise by planned measures, such as land-use planning, systems engineering for traffic, traffic planning, abatement by sound-insulation measures, and control of noise sources through measures such as noise barriers or low noise road surfaces.

It is important to note that the END does not set limit or target values, nor does it prescribe the measures to be included in the action plans, which are matters for the national authority in each Member State. The EPA has previously produced guidance for Local Authorities on the content of such plans (at <http://www.epa.ie/monitoringassessment/noisemapping/>)

I would encourage members of the public to participate in this consultation process and engage with the relevant mapping bodies regarding areas where elevated noise levels are being experienced, and assist in identifying mitigations measures (such as road barriers) that could be included in Noise Action Plans.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

167. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his key priorities in regard to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submit-

ted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in respect of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2285/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's policy commitments and investment priorities across key areas of national strategic importance are central to the delivery of many of the Strategic Outcomes detailed in the National Planning Framework: Ireland 2040 Our Plan. My Department will oversee a significant programme of capital investment during the lifetime of the National Development Plan 2018-2027, which is currently being finalised. Climate mitigation and adaptation are cross-cutting priorities for Government and for me. The National Policy Position on climate change identifies the achievement of a climate resilient economy and society by 2050 as a key objective. In line with the Government's National Mitigation Plan, investment in the key sectoral areas of transport, agriculture, energy and housing will be prioritised at an accelerating rate over the lifetime of the Plan. Action now will position Ireland to harness a range of benefits into the future, in terms of the creation of sustainable green jobs, sustainable food production, deepening our energy security, improving the quality of our lives and making our working and built environments healthier.

In my Department, a significant expansion of investment in energy efficiency upgrades, including deep retrofitting of housing, commercial and public building stock, will accelerate the contribution of the built environment to the collective effort to reduce CO2 emissions. Measures to progressively decarbonise electricity generation and to promote the electrification of heat and transport will be central to the achievement of national transition objectives. We also need to ensure that we develop appropriate levels of energy interconnection to cater for growing demand and diversify our sources of supply.

Delivery of the new high speed broadband network under the National Broadband Plan remains a key priority. Fast, secure, high capacity and reliable digital connectivity will underpin balanced regional development, allow new businesses and services to emerge and increase Ireland's competitiveness and attractiveness as a place to live and do business.

Investment in waste management infrastructure, air quality and biodiversity will be critical to our environmental and economic well-being, and to achieving EU circular economy and climate objectives.

Bullying in the Workplace

168. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2311/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There have been no bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within my department in the period since 2011. The Dignity at Work Policy was introduced by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2015 across the Civil Service to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace. The main purpose of this policy is to ensure all members of staff are aware that any form of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment is unacceptable and every member of staff has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner.

The Human Resources section in my Department provided information sessions to staff in 2015 and 2016 providing awareness of the policy, their obligations under the policy and the process to be undertaken where individuals believe that they have been bullied, harassed, or sexually harassed. All new staff recruited to my Department are informed of their obligations under the policy as part of the Department's induction training programme.

Bioenergy Strategy

169. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions abated by means of the bio-fuels obligations scheme; the source of this estimate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2360/18]

170. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the sustainability standards applied to biofuels used here; his plans to improve these standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2364/18]

171. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage of petrol fuelled vehicles here capable of using E10 fuel without difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2365/18]

172. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage of diesel fuelled vehicles here capable of using B7 fuel without difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2366/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 to 172, inclusive, together.

The Biofuels Obligation Scheme was introduced in 2010 and requires suppliers of motor fuel to ensure that biofuels make up a certain percentage of national annual fuel sales. It is a certificate based scheme with two certificates awarded per litre of sustainable biofuel if that biofuel is produced from wastes or residues and one certificate per litre for all other sustainable biofuels.

For each calendar year, a fuel supplier must hold sufficient biofuel obligation certificates to demonstrate compliance. The number of certificates required is determined by the biofuels obligation rate, which is currently set at 8%. This means that at the end of 2017, a fuel supplier must hold 8 biofuel certificates for every 92 litres of fossil fuel they placed on the road transport fuel market in 2017.

The Biofuels Obligation Scheme is administered by the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA). In the Biofuels Obligations Scheme Annual Report for 2016, which is available at www.nora.ie, NORA reports that over 174 million litres of sustainable biofuels were placed on the Irish road transport fuel market in that year. This equated to an average 78% reduction in carbon intensity when compared to an equivalent volume of fossil fuel based road transport fuels. NORA estimate this represents emissions savings of circa 324 thousand tonnes of carbon dioxide. The cost of the biofuel component in fuels are absorbed into the price of the fuel by the industry and hence it is not possible to state a cost per tonne of emissions savings.

The 2009 Renewable Energy Directive specifies a set of strict sustainability criteria which biofuels must meet in order to be counted towards a Member State's renewable energy transport target. Under these criteria, biofuels may not be made from raw materials originating from tropical forests or recently deforested areas, drained peatland, wetland or highly biodiverse

areas.

Under the European Union (Biofuel Sustainability Criteria) Regulations 2012, obligated parties must demonstrate compliance with these sustainability criteria in order to claim certificates for biofuels placed on the road transport fuel market. There are no plans at this stage to amend these criteria.

In relation to the use of B7 (diesel blended with 7% biodiesel), all diesel vehicles can operate with this fuel. However there are some concerns with performance of the fuel in winter and, for this reason, this blend is generally only available for part of the year. I do not have exact figures for petrol vehicles compatible with E10 (petrol blended with 10% ethanol), however I understand that a significant proportion of the Irish petrol vehicle fleet can operate with this fuel. All vehicles manufactured since 2011, and the majority of pre-2011 vehicles, can operate effectively using E10. There are no issues with any petrol vehicle using E5, which is the highest blend of petrol biofuel currently available. Any plans to move to E10 in the future will require consideration as to how to accommodate vehicles not compatible with E10. My Department is currently holding a public consultation on the Biofuels Obligation Scheme which is seeking feedback on the best way forward if higher blends of biofuels in petrol or diesel are to be deployed. Details on the consultation, which closes on 19 January 2018, can be found on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie .

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

173. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contribution electrified rail is expected to make to Ireland's 2020 RES-T target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2367/18]

174. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contribution electrified buses are expected to make to Ireland's 2020 RES-T target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2368/18]

175. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contribution electrified taxis are expected to make to Ireland's 2020 RES-T target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2369/18]

176. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contribution electrified private motor vehicles are expected to make to Ireland's 2020 RES-T target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2370/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 to 176, inclusive, together.

Ireland aims to meet our 2020 target for the renewable energy share in transport (RES-T) of 10% predominantly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels, with electric vehicles and electrified rail also making a contribution.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland estimates that electrified rail will contribute 0.08 percentage points, with electric vehicles contributing 0.13 percentage points towards the 10% RES-T target for 2020.

It is expected that private cars will account for the majority of the contribution, with vehicles such as buses, vans and taxis also contributing. In the coming weeks, my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport will be launching a new grant scheme to incentivise

the uptake of electric vehicles in the Small Public Service Vehicles industry. I expect this incentive will result in more electric taxis and other small public service vehicles on our roads over the coming years.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has engaged in a preliminary market consultation exercise on the various Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) bus technology types available. The NTA will analyse the suitability of the different bus technology types, such as natural gas and electric buses, in an Irish context. Under the new BusConnects Programme, there is a commitment to the uptake of new low emission vehicle technology in the bus fleet. It is anticipated that by 2023, half of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) bus fleet (approximately 500 buses) will be low-emission vehicles. The development of this measure will be progressed by the NTA in conjunction with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Broadband Service Provision

177. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps his Department will take in conjunction with the broadband task force to address gaps in the service affecting some homes in rural areas in which telephone lines are not running through a fibre cabinet and are therefore experiencing slow connection speeds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1678/18]

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. 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 areas where commercial operators will not provide this service. 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. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

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, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce the December 2016 report available on my Department's website, which contains 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits.

I published the third Taskforce Quarterly Progress Report in November 2017, which demonstrates that good progress has been made in delivering the actions. I plan to publish an Annual Report shortly. These reports show continuing progress and also the sustained level of engagement between actions owners and industry. The Annual Report will also contain a work programme for 2018, with new actions identified that will lead to improvements for consumers across Ireland.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

National Car Test

178. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the NCT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2135/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Car Test is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in individual cases. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Vehicle Registration

179. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the decision to use IRL as an identification mark on car licence plates as compared to an equivalent abbreviation of Éire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2146/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The decision to use IRL as an identification mark on car license plates as compared to an equivalent abbreviation of Éire was agreed by Ireland as a participant at the United Nations Convention on Road Traffic in Geneva in 1949. It was subsequently ratified on 31 May 1962.

Traffic Calming Measures

180. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the requested speed reduction measures from Lissivigeen roundabout to the Pike Hill, Killarney, County Kerry, will be implemented in order to prevent further fatalities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2166/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While the Road Traffic Act 2004 sets default speed limits for various categories of roads, elected members of local authorities have statutory responsibility for deciding on and making appropriate Special Speed Limit bye-laws for local roads within their administrative area.

To assist local authorities in the application of Special Speed Limits, my Department's updated Guidelines for Setting and Managing Speed Limits in Ireland, which is available to all local authorities, reiterates the statutory responsibilities of elected members in relation to the making of such Special Speed Limit bye-laws, subject to following Department Guidelines.

Therefore, any decision as to whether to reduce the speed limit from the Lissivigeen roundabout to the Pike Hill, Killarney, Co. Kerry is a matter for Kerry County Council, subject to the consent of Transport Infrastructure Ireland as the road in question is a National Road.

Road Safety

181. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Lewis Road junction with the bypass N22 road in Killarney, County Kerry, will be rectified in order to prevent further fatalities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2167/18]

182. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his

plans regarding the junction in Farranfore village, County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2172/18]

183. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans regarding the junction at Poulgorm Bridge at which the R569 meets the N22 in County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2174/18]

185. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the requested safety barriers will be erected at Rusheenbeg, Glenflesk, County Kerry, to prevent further fatalities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2201/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 to 183, inclusive, and 185 together.

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

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

Traffic Calming Measures

184. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the requested speed reduction will be implemented at Glenflesk village, County Kerry, on the N22 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2200/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While the Road Traffic Act 2004 sets default speed limits for various categories of roads, elected members of local authorities have statutory responsibility for deciding on and making appropriate Special Speed Limit bye-laws for local roads within their administrative area.

To assist local authorities in the application of Special Speed Limits, my Department's updated Guidelines for Setting and Managing Speed Limits in Ireland, which is available to all local authorities, reiterates the statutory responsibilities of elected members in relation to the making of such Special Speed Limit bye-laws, subject to following Department Guidelines.

Therefore, any decision as to whether to reduce the speed limit at Glenflesk Village on the N22 is a matter for Kerry County Council in the first instance, with the consent of Transport Infrastructure Ireland as the route in question is a National Road.

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 181.

Bus Services

186. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions that have taken place between the National Transport Authority and a bus service (details supplied) in counties Longford and Westmeath regarding service issues within this region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2208/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department pro-

vides funding for the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) to the National Transport Authority (NTA) which has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the RTP which now operates under the “Local Link” brand.

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

Light Rail Projects Provision

187. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure the service on the Luas green line extension is maximised; the additional funding his Department is providing in respect of this and of new park-and-ride facilities in the Dublin area to maximise public transport use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2247/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Green Line Capacity Enhancement project was recently approved by Government. The purpose of the project is to address current capacity limits at peak hours on the Luas Green Line and to cater for future demands along the line. The project will cost approximately €90 million and is proposed in the National Transport Authority’s (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035. It includes the lengthening of the existing green line tram fleet, the purchase of additional trams to meet future passenger demand and modifications to Sandyford Depot to stable and maintain these trams. A complementary investment project to lengthen the platforms at the Green Line stations was completed last year.

The capacity increases at peak periods provided by the project will assist in reducing crowding on the Green Line and enhance accessibility for mobility and sensory impaired users during these periods. The NTA have advised that the first of the new 55 metre long trams is expected to be deployed in the coming weeks.

In relation to the provision of new park and ride facilities in Dublin, I wish to advise the Deputy that future provision is being made under a number of programmes. The recently announced 4 Year Capital Plan provides for investment of over €770 million to progress the BusConnects programme to address growing congestion in the Dublin region in the short to medium term, including the provision of bus based Park and Ride facilities. BusConnects was launched last summer by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and work is ongoing on the redesign of the bus services network and also on infrastructure proposals for Core Bus Corridors which will be an integral part of the programme. When this work is completed the proposals will be launched for public consultation in the first half of this year. The results of the public consultation will inform the final decisions to be made on the network redesign, Core Bus Corridors and park and ride facilities.

The NTAs Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area also includes the planned development of a network of strategic rail-based park and ride facilities where rail services intersect with the national road network. It is proposed that these facilities would be located at Swords, Finglas, Dunboyne, Liffey Valley, Naas Road, Carrickmines, Woodbrook and Greystones. The Strategy indicates that further development of local park and ride facilities will also be considered at appropriate locations on the rail network in the outer parts of the Dublin metropolitan network and hinterland.

The Government’s Capital Plan published in 2015 provides for investment of over €700 million to progress new Metro North. Based on the outcome of the recent Fingal/North Dublin

Transport Study, the National Transport Authority has recommended that a revised metro project be selected as the appropriate public transport project to address the transport needs of the Swords/Airport/City-Centre Corridor. This Metro line will run from Dublin's south city centre via Dublin Airport and terminating at Estuary that will be served by a strategic Park & Ride. Arising from an option analysis and selection study of possible metro alignments and station locations, a final route and station location will be established, after which a public consultation process will be undertaken on the Emerging Preferred Route in early 2018.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

188. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2298/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy may be aware, the Government has proposed that a ten year capital plan will be set out which will take account of the National Planning Framework. My Department will also take that into account when setting infrastructure investment priorities in the years up to 2027. This capital plan is likely to be discussed at cabinet in the coming weeks.

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

I trust the Deputy will find that useful.

Departmental Data

189. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2324/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department's Human Resources Division has received one complaint of bullying from members of staff in each of the years 2011 and 2015. Neither complaint was upheld following investigation.

In terms of addressing complaints of bullying and sexual harassment, my Department is strongly committed to implementing the Civil Service Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy - Dignity at Work. Each staff member is made aware that all forms of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment are unacceptable standards of behaviour.

On appointment, all staff receive a copy of the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, which sets the standards for their behaviour at work and towards colleagues. The Code also includes a commitment for staff to observe and support the Dignity at Work Policy.

National Mitigation Plan Data

190. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions abated by measures to encourage a modal shift to cycling and walking; the source of this estimate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2361/18]

191. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions abated by measures to encourage a modal shift to public transport; the source of this estimate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2362/18]

192. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions abated by measures to reduce the speed of motor vehicles; the source of this estimate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2363/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 to 192, inclusive, together.

Central to the development of the National Mitigation Plan (NMP) was the robust economic evaluation of key emission mitigation measures. A Marginal Abatement Cost Curve approach (MACC) was used to compare ‘business-as-usual’ economic activity to ‘low carbon’ options. The MACC tool was developed by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). An estimated marginal cost per tonne of carbon abated was attributed to certain mitigation measures. This technique allows for comparative analysis of ‘low carbon’ alternatives across the key sectors in the NMP. An overview of costs and emission reduction potential of sector specific mitigation measures can be found in the NMP (<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/National%20Mitigation%20Plan%202017.pdf>).

The Strategic Research and Analysis Division within my own Department employed the MACC tool to help model the economic and environmental impact of reducing speed limits on motorways from 120km/h to 110km/h for cars/vans and from 90km/h to 80km/h for heavy duty vehicles. They estimated that such a measure would be associated with a marginal cost of €573 per tonne of carbon abated. Reducing speed limits lessens energy use; it is estimated that this measure could potentially reduce CO₂ emissions by about 1.9Mt CO₂ between 2017 and 2030. The introduction of this measure would require extensive consideration of economic impact, traffic flows, implications of traffic transfer on to secondary networks, enforcement requirements, and potential modifications to the design of existing motorway infrastructure.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the cost per tonne of carbon abated through measures that encourage modal shift to either public transport or active travel modes is not currently available in the format sought. Limitations in ascertaining robust baseline data and selecting representative modal shift scenarios hinder meaningful analysis; however, further work on modelling scenarios will continue over the lifetime of the NMP, and in the future it may be possible to do similar technical modelling work on these options.

In the meantime, modal shift towards public and sustainable transport continues to be usefully measured using other tools such as the National Travel Survey and the Canal Cordon Report. Findings from these sources show that in Dublin alone, over 67% of all journeys in to the city centre are now made through sustainable means (walking, cycling, public transport) - a dramatic increase from 59% of journeys in 2010; while cycling and walking have grown greatly in popularity increasing by over 16% and nearly 9% respectively between 2014 and 2016. Nationally public transport accounts for 5.5% of all journeys taken, with the number of passengers using public transport increasing to 251 million in 2017 - a 7% increase since 2016. Promoting modal shift away from the private car results in fewer CO₂ emissions as well as a reduction in vehicle volume and so is an integral measure in decarbonising the Transport sector.

Child and Family Agency Data

193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the living arrangements of young persons in receipt of aftercare services as reported in the Tusla quarterly service performance and activity reports; the types of accommodation included in the other category in its published breakdowns of living arrangements; if homeless accommodation is included in this category; the number in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2156/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The most recent aftercare data available from Tusla indicates that the majority of young people aged 18-22 years, in receipt of aftercare services, remained with their foster families, while some progress to independent living. The following table outlines the living arrangements of young adults in receipt of aftercare services in Q3 2017.

Living Arrangements in aftercare	Number and % of young people (18-22)
Remained with carers	878 (45.9%)
Independent living	522 (27.3%)
Returned home/family	203 (10.6%)
Other Accommodation	171 (8.9%)
Residential placement	95 (5%)
Supported lodgings	45 (2.4%)
Total	1,914 (100%)

Tusla has informed me that the category ‘Other Accommodation’ includes psychiatric services, disability services, mother and baby centres and prison. A breakdown of the number of young adults in each type of accommodation included in this category is not available.

Tusla policy is not to discharge young adults from care into homeless services. Tusla is working with my Department, and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, on projects to secure housing for care leavers.

Aftercare is an adult service, and young adults may choose whether they wish to engage with it. Aftercare workers engage with young adults leaving care to ensure that their needs are met in transitioning to adulthood.

Child Protection

194. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the parallel reporting obligations in respect of child protection concerns that have been created by the mandatory reporting provisions of the Children First Act 2015 and the existing provisions of the Withholding of Information Act 2012; and if a mandated reporter could be open to potential prosecution should they fail to report their child protection concerns to both Tusla and An Garda Síochána. [2158/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Children First Act 2015 places a statutory obligations on persons, who have been identified by virtue of their training, qualifications and experience, to makes reports of concerns of harm, above a defined threshold, to Tusla, The Child and Family Agency.

There are no criminal sanctions in the Children First Act in relation to the failure to make a mandated report. However, a mandated person who does not meet their statutory obligations

could be subject to administrative sanctions. For example, if following an inquiry, it transpires that a mandated reporter has failed to make a mandated report, it is open to Tusla to report that mandated person to their employer or the Fitness to Practice committee of their professional regulatory body, or to pass that information on to the National Vetting Bureau.

The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, makes provision for the reporting of relevant information to the Gardaí, and it also contains criminal sanctions in relation to the withholding of information from the Gardaí.

The provisions of the Withholding Act are in addition to any reporting requirements under the Children First Act.

Child and Family Agency Policy

195. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of Tusla's draft policy concerning adult disclosures of abuse entitled policy and procedures for responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect September 2014 in view of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman's request for the publication of this document. [2159/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am informed that the "Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect", dated September 2014, is the current policy and that all Tusla staff had been advised of same. I understand that a review of the policy is ongoing, which includes consideration of how to support staff with additional guidance.

I have sought an update from Tusla with regard to the publication of this document.

Child and Family Agency Policy

196. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department and Tusla plan to use the publication of the policy and procedures for responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect as an opportunity to proactively implement principles of the EU Directive on the Rights of Victims (details supplied). [2160/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The EU Directive referred to by the Deputy was transposed into national law by the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017, and falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The assessment of allegations of abuse is a very complex area and Tusla is required to take full account of natural justice, the constitutional rights of the accused and national law to balance the competing rights of those involved. Tusla has a statutory obligation under section 3 of the Child Care Act, 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection [section (3) (1)], and in doing so, they are required to regard the welfare of the child as the first and paramount consideration [section (3) (2) (b) (i)].

It is in this context, that the "Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse and Neglect" was developed by Tusla, to set out the procedures for staff to follow when responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect.

I am informed that the "Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

and Neglect”, dated September 2014, is the current policy and that all Tusla staff had been advised of same. I understand that a review of the policy is ongoing, which includes consideration of how to support staff with additional guidance.

On foot of this Parliamentary Question, I will request that Tusla, in the context of the aforementioned review, take cognisance of the principles of this EU Directive as expressed in Irish law, if it has not already done so.

HIQA Investigations

197. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the investigation by HIQA into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern, by Tusla, directed by her Department; and when a report is expected. [2161/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am advised by HIQA that the investigation referred to by the Deputy is underway, and proceeding as scheduled. It is envisaged that the investigation will be completed by the end of Quarter 2 of this year.

It is expected that the findings of the investigation will be published by HIQA in due course.

Adoption Legislation

198. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to fully enact the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2185/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017, other than Section 24(1)(a) was commenced on 19 October 2017. Section 24(1)(a) which will come in to operation on 1 February 2018, provides that before making an application for a child to be adopted because of parental failure, Tusla – the Child and Family Agency must be satisfied that every reasonable effort has been made to support the parents of the child in question.

Child and Family Agency Funding

199. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the funding difficulties being faced by a centre (details supplied) and the difficulties the centre faces in 2018 operating on its budget; and if she will request Tusla to re-examine the funding allocation for the centre for 2018 and 2019 with a view to increasing the funding level to a more appropriate sum at the top end of the allocation scale for example above €130,000 per annum. [2278/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are over 100 Family Resource Centres currently in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provides funding to the centres under an annual Service Level Agreement. This funding is provided by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres. The 2017 Tusla allocation to Family Resource Centres was €13.512m.

In 2015, the centre referred to by the Deputy received funding from Tusla of over €83,000,

which was increased by some €3,000 in 2016. At the end of 2016, the Centre also received a once-off payment to offset financial difficulties, and a once-off grant of €30,000 for the upgrade of equipment and infrastructure.

Tusla provided core funding of over €86,000 to the centre in 2017. In addition to this, the centre in question received €8,000 for counselling and play therapy services, over €18,000 in once-off funding for small works, and €20,000 in exceptional once-off additional funding. In total, Tusla provided over €132,000 in funding to the centre referred to by the Deputy in 2017.

Tusla fully appreciates the role that Family Resource Centres play in offering early intervention support to families in difficulty. Tusla staff have met with representatives of the centre in question in recent weeks regarding their concerns.

In 2018, Family Resource Centres are being asked to work with their local Tusla office to identify services needed in their community and up to €10,000 will be available to each Family Resource Centre, subject to approval of their proposal. Tusla will continue to work with Family Resource Centres throughout the country, and will discuss service needs and funding resources with centres, where appropriate.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

200. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her key priorities in relation to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2284/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform published the “Report of the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan: Building on Recovery 2016-2021” in September 2017. I understand that the review was made available to all Oireachtas members.

This was followed by the allocation of additional capital funding for public investment over the period 2018 - 2021 in the context of the 2018 Estimates. My Department now has a capital allocation of €123 million over this period.

Building on this investment, my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform is planning to publish a new 10 year National Investment Plan for the period 2018 - 2027. I have indicated that there will be significant capital investment required in the area of childcare. My Department is currently working to identify the level of investment required.

Bullying in the Workplace

201. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within her Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within her Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2310/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Since my Department’s establishment in June 2011, there have been three allegations of bullying, one in 2011 and two in 2014. There have been no sexual harassment complaints in the same period.

Year	Number of allegations of Bullying	Informal Resolution or Investigation undertaken	Outcome of Investigation
2011	1	Formal Investigation	Allegation not upheld
2014	2	Informal Resolution	Not applicable

It is a central policy of my Department to ensure that managers and staff encourage and maintain good employee relations in order to ensure a motivated workforce and an efficient service. The Dignity at Work - Civil Service anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy is the civil service policy for dealing with harassment, sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace.

Community Banking

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the community banking report will be published (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2241/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks.

A project team comprising officials from my Department and the Department of Finance was established last year to progress this commitment. The project team carried out detailed research into the concept of a public banking model, with a particular focus on the Sparkassen model. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the concept of a community banking model, ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies from a range of stakeholders were received.

As part of their research, officials from both Government Departments met with representatives from the Savings Banks Foundation for International Co-operation and Irish Rural Link. These organisations put forward a proposal as to how a local public bank, based on the Sparkassen model, could work in Ireland.

The Departmental officials have now finalised their report and have submitted their findings to the Minister for Finance and myself. The report will be brought to Government shortly for consideration.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

203. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his key priorities of in relation to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2296/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently preparing a new 10 year National Capital Investment Plan for the period 2018-2027, which will be published alongside, and in support of, the forthcoming National Planning Framework.

The National Investment Plan will align with the strategic objectives to be set out in the National Planning Framework. The objectives which were outlined in the draft of the Framework which was published for public consultation in September 2017 strongly support regional, rural and community development.

The capital programmes currently administered by my Department such as LEADER, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Rural Recreation Programme and Libraries Investment are strong drivers of rural and community development and I would expect to see them referenced in the National Investment Plan. However, I would also be supportive of targeted projects delivered by other Government Departments in areas such as transport, broadband investment and enterprise support which will also make an important contribution to rural and regional development.

My Department has been in on-going contact with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the National Investment Plan and will continue to work with that Department and the Plan is finalised.

Bullying in the Workplace

204. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2322/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Rural and Community Development was established on 19 July 2017 to provide a renewed and consolidated focus on rural and community development in Ireland.

The Department is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation. The key policy in place in this regard is the Dignity at Work Policy. This policy outlines the procedures in place and the steps which individuals may take if they believe that they have been bullied, harassed, or sexually harassed. All staff are made aware of the contents of this policy and the procedures to be followed, as part of the induction process for new employees. This ensures that all members of staff are aware that all forms of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment are unacceptable and that every staff member has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner.

In addition staff may be referred by the Department's HR Manager to the Civil and Public Service Mediation Service, as a means to resolve complaints of bullying and harassment, as appropriate, where local efforts to resolve complaints have been exhausted.

There have been no bullying or sexual harassment claims made since the formation of the Department, to date.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

205. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer's allowance review will be completed for a person (details supplied); the length of time this matter has been ongoing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2137/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 21 May 2017.

One of the qualifying conditions for receipt of CA is that the means of the person concerned must be less than the statutory limit.

Following an investigation it was determined that the means of the person concerned were not less than the statutory limit and that she was therefore not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 2 October 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision in December and submitted additional evidence in support of her application.

The review is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

206. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the community employment scheme pension provision as per the Labour Court recommendation whereby community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors were deemed entitled to certain pension arrangements (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2142/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector. The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for such employees even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. It is open to individuals to make provision for a pension by way of PRSA which all employers are obliged to facilitate.

My Department was neither party to or bound by the Labour Court Recommendation (LCR19293). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the issue of CE supervisors' pension provision is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department is represented on this group, as are IMPACT, SIPTU, Pobal and other relevant Government Departments.

The Forum last met on 23 November 2017 and I understand that a paper outlining the costs involved was presented. The unions have agreed to review and revert as soon as possible. Following on from this, a meeting is to be arranged between the trade unions and my colleague, Pascal Donohoe T.D. Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

207. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection

her views on the increases being charged to community employment schemes by insurance companies and the impact that this is having on already reduced materials budgets whereby the intention that this budget be used to support the work of the schemes is being absorbed by increases in insurance payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2145/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is aware that there had been an increase in insurance premiums for Community Employment (CE) schemes over recent years. The main reason cited for this is an increase in claims frequency by such schemes. In the first instance, my Department recommends that schemes seek alternative quotes to ensure they get value for money. Also, if CE schemes are not filling their contracted number of participants, it is recommended that they align their insurance requirement with actual participant numbers. Schemes are also asked to be especially mindful of their obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

The annual budget provided to CE schemes is based on a detailed appraisal of their actual annual expenditure levels in previous years and includes an amount to cover consumable services and materials, including insurance, necessary for the effective operation of the project.

If a scheme is experiencing particular difficulties with insurance costs, the Sponsor should contact their local DEASP Intreo Centre and the matter will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

208. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a fuel allowance payment for a person (details supplied) will be issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2196/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is no record of an application for a DEASP payment having been received by the Department from the person concerned. Once a completed application is received by the Department a Deciding Officer (DO) will then be in a position to decide the claim including any entitlement to Fuel Allowance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

209. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a review will be conducted into the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2207/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following the submission of further medical evidence by the person concerned, their case has been reviewed and they have been awarded disability allowance with effect from 7 June 2017. Their first payment will be made on 7 February 2018.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Reports

210. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of reports and reviews that have been commissioned since 14 June 2017; the publication date or expected publication date of each; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2215/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested is currently being compiled by my Department and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Unemployment Data

211. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rate of jobless households here; the way in which this compares to the EU average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2244/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the EUROSTAT Labour Force Survey, in 2016 there were 170.76 million households in the EU (excluding households composed solely of students or solely of inactive people aged 65 and over). Of these, some 29.49 million households (17.3% of the total) were jobless - that is, no adult in the household was working.

For Ireland, the total number of relevant households was 1,440,600, and of these some 253,000 (17.6% of the total) were jobless.

Although the figure for Ireland has fallen from a high of 23% in 2012 as a result of the economic recovery, government remains concerned about aspects of household joblessness that go beyond the standard measures of unemployment and receipt of jobseeker’s payments. Relevant groups, not normally considered to be unemployed, include economically inactive lone parents, people with disabilities, and the adult dependants of unemployed people, all of whom might benefit from closer attachment to employment and the labour market. A range of policy reforms has been taken affecting these groups, and further reforms were considered in consultation with representative bodies for those involved. These policy developments are set out in the *Pathways to Work Action Plan for Jobless Households* which I published on 25, September 2017. Development of the Action Plan fulfils a commitment in the Programme for Government and in the overall *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* strategy. It also responds to concerns about the level of household joblessness raised in Country-Specific Recommendations to Ireland by the EU.

The *Action Plan for Jobless Households* is an example of one of the many measures that Government is implementing, with a view to assisting people and families to become work ready and gain employment. The Plan aims to extend activation services to people who are not working, but are not defined as unemployed by traditional measures. It focuses in particular on improving employment rates of households with children – both the traditional ‘nuclear’ family and the lone parent family. A number of key policy initiatives to achieve that goal are identified as follows:

- **Extend active engagement** with the Intreo employment service to additional groups of economically inactive working age adults;

- **Improve incentives and remove barriers** for people transitioning from welfare to employment;

- **Pilot a family focused case management approach** in five geographical areas to improve employment rates and reduce joblessness in households across Ireland.

Progress against each of the reform actions and milestones will be monitored and reported on quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on the Economy and Jobs. Implementation of these policy measures should see the level of joblessness fall more rapidly than is already anticipated over the next few years. These targets are in addition to the existing *Pathways to Work* targets 2020 – bringing unemployment down to between 5% and 6%, bringing long-term unemployment below 2.5%, and bringing youth unemployment below 12%.

The *Action Plan for Jobless Households* aims to identify and remove barriers that are currently preventing people from getting a fair chance, thus building a Republic of Opportunity for all.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

212. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that applied for a social welfare payment in 2017; the percentage that were refused a payment; the percentage that were successful on appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2245/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed where available in the attached tabular statements.

Overall, 60.1% (11,405) of appeals finalised in 2017 had a favourable outcome for the appellant, i.e. were either allowed in full or in part, or resolved by way of a revised decision by a Deciding Officer.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was wrong.

Where new evidence is provided with an appeal the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer as was the case in 37.6% of favourable outcomes for appeals in 2017.

Where the decision is not revised in the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds and in addition, an Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may influence the outcome of an appeal.

Claims processed in 2017 for all available schemes

2017	Claims Pending Start of Year	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	% of Cleared Claims Rejected	Cleared
State Pension Contributory (Irish)	3,593	36,672	26,212	9,442	23%	40,743
State Pension Non-Contributory	1,762	9,187	7,577	2,139	19%	11,039
Jobseeker’s Benefit	3,562	129,241	118,076	2,459	2%	134,905
Jobseeker’s Allowance	5,955	155,854	124,790	10,238	6%	162,168

Questions - Written Answers

2017	Claims Pending Start of Year	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	% of Cleared Claims Rejected	Cleared
One-Parent Family Payment	1,001	11,452	8,741	725	6%	11,360
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	288	7,599	5,695	1,240	17%	7,370
Maternity Benefit	3,953	44,227	45,621	1,570	3%	48,149
Disability Allowance	6,058	22,538	15,814	14,800	47%	31,592
Illness Benefit	2,273	209,750	154,692	50,083	24%	209,719
Invalidity Pension	2,034	9,454	7,691	5,070	37%	13,800
Carer's Allowance	4,461	18,152	14,378	7,920	33%	24,186
Child Benefit (Domestic & FRA)	1,524	32,448	31,301	674	2%	32,100
Child Benefit (EU Regulation)	1,298	3,473	3,009	716	19%	3,783
Family Income Supplement (New Claims)	1,780	31,191	21,779	9,208	30%	30,987
Family Income Supplement (Renewals)	695	42,714	31,130	11,538	27%	42,668
Household Benefits	3,177	75,593	56,020	18,030	21%	85,878
Total		839,545	672,526	145,852	16%	890,447

Outcome of Appeals by category 2017

-	Allowed by Appeals Officer	Partially Allowed by Appeals Officer	Revised Deciding Officer's Decision	Disallowed	Withdrawn	Total
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	7521.9%	349.9%	7822.7%	12837.3%	288.2%	343
State Pension (Contributory)	359.9%	123.4%	7621.5%	21861.6%	133.7%	354
State Pension (Transition)	133.3%	-0.0%	-0.0%	266.7%	-0.0%	3
Widow's/Widower's Pension (Contributory)	825.8%	-0.0%	722.6%	1548.4%	13.2%	31
Death Benefit	-0.0%	-0.0%	-0.0%	1100.0%	-0.0%	1
Bereavement Grant	1100.0%	-0.0%	-0.0%	-0.0%	-0.0%	1
Jobseeker's Allowance - Payments	34922.2%	664.2%	30919.6%	66542.3%	18411.7%	1,573
Jobseeker's Transitional	1027.0%	410.8%	1027.0%	616.2%	718.9%	37
Jobseeker's Allowance - Means	18712.9%	825.6%	26418.2%	70848.7%	21214.6%	1,453
One Parent Family Payment	6726.1%	197.4%	5421.0%	6726.1%	5019.5%	257
Widow's/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory)	730.4%	417.4%	313.0%	939.1%	-0.0%	23
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	30422.5%	342.5%	22917.0%	60244.6%	18013.3%	1,349
Farm Assist	2215.5%	1812.7%	2819.7%	6042.3%	149.9%	142
Pre-Retirement Allowance	-0.0%	-0.0%	1100.0%	-0.0%	-0.0%	1
Jobseeker's Benefit	8317.3%	214.4%	11724.4%	20643.0%	5210.9%	479
Deserted Wife's Benefit	240.0%	120.0%	-0.0%	240.0%	-0.0%	5
Maternity Benefit	1014.1%	34.2%	811.3%	4969.0%	11.4%	71
Paternity Benefit	112.5%	-0.0%	337.5%	337.5%	112.5%	8

17 January 2018

Adoptive Benefit	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	2100.0%	- 0.0%	2
Treatment Benefits	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	1100.0%	- 0.0%	1
Disability Allowance	2,97560.3%	701.4%	56311.4%	1,21124.5%	1152.3%	4,934
Blind Pension	16.7%	16.7%	320.0%	746.7%	320.0%	15
Partial Capacity Benefit	1533.3%	12.2%	1124.4%	1431.1%	4 8.9%	45

	Allowed by Appeals Of-ficer	Partially Allowed by Appeals Of-ficer	Revised Deciding Officer's Decision	Disallowed	Withdrawn	Total
Carer's Allowance	120435.2%	1614.7%	78022.8%	1,19935.1%	722.1%	3,416
Domiciliary Care Allow-ance	29737.1%	101.2%	34342.8%	13516.9%	162.0%	801
Carers Support Grant	3522.6%	21.3%	4529.0%	7246.5%	10.6%	155
Illness Benefit	11823.0%	81.6%	14027.2%	18936.8%	5911.5%	514
Injury Benefit	37.9%	- 0.0%	25.3%	2771.1%	615.8%	38
Invalidity Pension	36527.1%	70.5%	69151.3%	26219.4%	231.7%	1,348
Disablement Benefit	8634.4%	197.6%	3012.0%	10943.6%	62.4%	250
Incapacity Supplement	3 30.0%	1 10.0%	3 30.0%	3 30.0%	- 0.0%	10
Medical Care	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	150.0%	150.0%	- 0.0%	2
Carer's Benefit	2322.1%	21.9%	3937.5%	3735.6%	32.9%	104
Child Benefit	6815.5%	235.3%	15435.2%	17840.6%	153.4%	438
Family Income Supple-ment	7615.1%	153.0%	26753.1%	13025.8%	153.0%	503
Back To Work Family Dividend	7 17.1%	- 0.0%	49.8%	2561.0%	5 12.2%	41
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	533.3%	16.7%	213.3%	746.7%	- 0.0%	15
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	1339.4%	26.1%	4 12.1%	1442.4%	- 0.0%	33
Widowed Parent Grant	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	2 100.0%	- 0.0%	2
Insurability	3424.5%	4 2.9%	117.9%	3726.6%	53 38.1%	139
Liabile Relative's	- 0.0%	423.5%	- 0.0%	1164.7%	2 11.8%	17
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	311.5%	- 0.0%	311.5%	2076.9%	- 0.0%	26
TOTAL APPEALS	6,49334.2%	6293.3%	4,28322.6%	6,43433.9%	1,1416.0%	18,890

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

213. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that availed of the back to work enterprise allowance in 2017; the estimated full year cost of extending the period whereby a person can keep a percentage of their social welfare payment from two to three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2246/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is designed to provide a monetary incentive for people who are on social welfare payments to develop a business while allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their qualifying social welfare payment over two years; 100% in year 1 and 75% in year 2.

The average number of participants on the BTWEA scheme in 2017 was 10,380.

The BTWEA underwent a review that was published in 2017. The research conducted during this review demonstrated that the numbers returning from self-employment to the Live Register, after participating on the scheme, are low. Based on the comparison of the BTWEA participants to a control group of similar jobseekers who did not choose the scheme as an option, the BTWEA participant was over twice as likely to remain off the Live Register six months after the payments on the scheme had ceased. This trend continues when examined following an 18 month period after the payments ceasing. One of the considerations of the review was the period of payment and it was deemed not necessary to amend the current 2 year period in light of the success of participants exiting the live Register.

The part played by the BTWEA in supporting the long-term unemployed and other welfare recipients to take up self-employment opportunities is significant.

It is estimated that cost of extending the scheme to a third year, assuming that the payment in year 3 would be equivalent to year 2, would be approximately €50m.

There are no plans to amend the scheme at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Priorities

214. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her key priorities in relation to the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2289/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Capital Review Plan 2016 – 2021 was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in September, 2017. The Plan outlines the Department's intentions to continue to make significant investment in the continued upgrading and modernisation of DEASP's IT infrastructure and in carrying out works associated to meet the requirements of the Intreo service and other related support activities.

I understand the new proposed National Development Plan is due to be published shortly. However, I am not in a position comment on this Plan until it is published.

Departmental Staff Grievance Procedures

215. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there have been bullying or sexual harassment claims lodged within her Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place within her department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2315/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Dignity at Work policy is the anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy for the Irish Civil Service. This policy came into effect on 20th February 2015 and replaced the previous policy, 'A Positive Working Environment'. State bodies and agencies under the aegis of this Department have similar policies in place. The Dignity at Work policy sets out the responsibilities all individuals have in ensuring a work environment free of bullying, harassment and

sexual harassment.

This Department emphasises the use of informal resolution methods and mediation as early as possible during workplace disputes, with formal investigations taking place where these methods of resolution have been exhausted or are not appropriate.

Training on the Dignity At Work policy is provided through the Department's HR Policies and Procedure course and the Induction and Orientation course for new entrants. The Dignity At Work policy is also available to all staff on the Department's intranet site, Stór.

There are no figures available for complaints received prior to 2013.

Bullying or Sexual Harassment complaints received in each year since 2013:

Year	Number of complaints received	Complaints investigated
2013	10	2
2014	9	4
2015	12	2
2016	9	3
2017	11	1

Of the 12 complaints investigated, two were upheld.

Living Alone Allowance

216. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to ease the rules relating to the living alone and supplementary allowances to allow persons experiencing housing issues and homelessness to reside at the home of a relative without affecting the income of that relative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2359/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The living alone allowance (LAA) is an increase of €9.00 per week made to people who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments, including State pensions, who are living alone. It is also available to people who are under 66 years of age who are living alone and are in receipt of long-term illness and disability payments. The payment of the living alone allowance is considered secondary, or non-primary, in nature which is incorporated into the person's qualifying payment. The effect of the allowance is to increase the rate of payment to such people, recognizing that there are economies of scale associated with living with another person.

Significant costs would arise if the criteria were relaxed in the manner suggested by the Deputy, particularly as many existing domestic arrangements could fall within the definition of the living alone allowance criteria, as many adult children of older people live with them, and might become homeless if they had to leave the family home. There would also, clearly, be significant administrative challenges in determining whether such co-residents of pensioners would in fact become homeless if they could not reside in their current address.

In addition to the living alone allowance my Department makes a range of other payments, both cash and non-cash on a weekly, monthly or less frequent basis. These payments are considered secondary, or non-primary, in nature. In addition to the living alone increase a person may also be eligible for household benefits (worth €580 per year), fuel allowance (worth €607 per year) or supports under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme such as rent supplement.

These secondary payments are in some cases are subject to a means or household composition test, which are valuable supports for recipients.

The adult child of a householder moving back into the family home might reduce such additional allowances previously held by the householder. However, the economies of scale from living together should mean that a weekly contribution by the person moving in would more than compensate for any such reduction in payments from my Department which are, as I said, to compensate for the greater costs associated with living alone.

The criteria for the Department's supplementary schemes are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. The guidelines for supplementary schemes are kept under review. However, any decision to change the requirement for these schemes would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 32.

Youth Unemployment Measures

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which efforts are being made to address long term youth unemployment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2374/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government's primary strategy to tackle unemployment – including long-term unemployment and youth unemployment – is twofold. The Action Plan for Jobs supports continuing strong economic recovery and employment growth. Policies and actions to ensure that unemployed people benefit from the increase in employment are set out in the strategy paper *Pathways to Work 2016-2020*.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing both youth and long-term unemployment.

For example, the most recent data shows that Irish youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 14.8% in September 2017. Irish youth unemployment has thus fallen from well above the EU average in 2012 (23%) to well below the current EU figure of 19.1%.

Latest available data shows that the long-term unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of 9.5% in 2012 to 3.1% in Q2 2017. The long-term unemployment rate for young people has fallen from over 15% at peak to below 5% in mid-2017.

Both the youth and long-term figures can be expected to fall further this year in line with the continuing forecast fall in overall unemployment. Additionally, Ireland is on course to bring youth unemployment below 12% and long-term unemployment below 2.5% in accordance with *Pathways to Work* targets for 2020.

Policy continues to focus on support for the long-term unemployed and young unemployed. For example, the *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* strategy prioritises long-term unemployed people – most notably through the roll-out of JobPath to engage more systematically with this group; through targeted wage subsidies under JobsPlus; and through reserved places for long-term unemployed jobseekers on employment and training programmes.

Under the Youth Guarantee process there is monthly engagement by case officers with un-employed young people to assist them to prepare and implement personal progression plans for employment. Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes.

Later this year I will be introducing a new work experience programme targeted specifically at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face significant barriers to gaining employment – people who even during the Celtic Tiger years would have found it difficult to get a foothold on the career ladder. The new Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) will provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. Host Organisations will be encouraged to hire participants who have performed well and will qualify for a financial subsidy under *JobsPlus Youth*. YESS will compliment other initiatives such as the expanded range of Apprenticeships and Career Traineeships.

These current and planned measures, together with the continuing strong performance of the economy, will support further reductions in long term unemployment and youth unemployment.

State Pensions Payments

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the degree to which efforts are being made to award State pensions to those persons whose contribution record was interrupted for family or other reasons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2375/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are three main State pensions. Firstly, the State pension non-contributory is a means-tested pension funded from taxation. Secondly, the State pension contributory, which is not means-tested, is paid from the Social Insurance Fund, via the PRSI system. The third main state pension available to some people over 66 is the Widows/Widowers Contributory Pension.

It is important to ensure those qualifying for the contributory pension have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. Such contributory pensions, with rates of payment linked to contributions made into a fund, are the norm internationally.

To ensure that people can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions, paid or credited, over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

It should be noted that the rateband changes introduced in 2012 did not impact upon a person's ability to qualify for a pension, as they introduced new rates of payment for reduced rate State pension (contributory) pensioners. Nor did those changes impact upon a person's ability to qualify for a maximum rate contributory pension, as such pensioners would not have had enough contributions to qualify for a full rate pension before the changes were introduced under the previous ratebands introduced in 2000.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension contributory easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. This

has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of his or her pension.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for the means-tested State pension non-contributory, which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

When all payments across the State pension system are taken into account, the difference in the average direct payment to men and women is approximately 1% in Ireland. This would be very low by European standards, and as a result CSO figures show that poverty levels among those over 66 are very low for both men and women, and are at parity. In the latest figures, the rate of Consistent Poverty for men over 66 was 1.79% for men and 1.36% for women, compared to 8.3% for the general population.

Later this year, I plan to propose legislation to introduce a total contributions approach to the calculation of the State Pension (Contributory), replacing the current yearly average approach. The position of homemakers will be carefully considered in the context of that reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

220. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of restoring State pension levels to those applicable previously; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2376/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The current rate bands applying to the State pension contributory were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. The rate bands prior to 2000 were less generous, and the improved rate bands introduced in 2000 were a feature of the economic and political environment at that time. The economic crash changed the focus and while other payments were reduced as a result, the core rates of the pension, which many pensioners were solely dependent on, were maintained. Instead, the rates for people who had additional means and lesser PRSI contribution records were reduced.

The 2012 rate bands more closely reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person than those in place between 2000 and 2012. The current rate bands still provide pensions to people which are not proportionate with their level of contribution. For example, a person with only 20 years of contributions over nearly 50 years will still receive an 85% pension, whereas someone who paid into the system every week of those 50 years receives the 100% rate.

It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands from January 2018 would result in an annual cost of well over €70 million extra in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 to €12 million extra each following year.

I committed to examine in depth various options that may provide some relief to those who would have a higher contributory pension had the rate bands not been amended in 2012. Officials in my Department have completed a report on this matter, which I intend to bring to a cabinet committee later this week. Following that meeting, and subject to any necessary amendment or further discussions, I will then bring the report to Government for consideration.

The National Pensions Framework proposed that a total contribution approach should replace the yearly average approach to the calculation of the State Pension (contributory) from 2020, which would remove anomalies created by the current system in 1961. It is hoped to start a consultation process regarding this reform with relevant stakeholders shortly. Following this process, a proposal to Government will be submitted seeking approval of the new approach.

This reform will make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. It will also have significant homemakers provisions that will assist those pensioners who spent significant periods caring for people with a caring need.

The main aim of Government policy on pensions is to make sure that pensions are affordable, sustainable and keep their value in the coming years. The reforms that are planned will result in a more inclusive and fairer pension system for all citizens.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the annual cost of State pensions from 2004 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2377/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information sought by the Deputy is detailed in the tables.

The 2018 Revised Estimate for pension expenditure is €7,571,360 million. Details of expenditure to date in 2018 will not be available until the first week of February.

Table 1: Pensions Expenditure Outturn, 2004-2010

Expenditure (€000)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State Pension (Non Contributory)	599,988	631,299	727,782	920,167	972,765	1,000,546	977,293
State Pension (Contributory)	1,050,348	1,152,849	1,580,896	2,754,749	3,117,855	3,367,733	3,451,503
State Pension (Transition)	983,706	1,060,052	857,627	79,070	92,089	104,976	108,194
Widows', Widowers'/ Surviving Civil Partners' Contributory	906,449	998,524	1,094,884	1,204,979	1,299,039	1,353,391	1,335,584
Widows', Widowers'/ Surviving Civil Partners' Death Benefit	6,185	6,523	7,047	7,574	8,036	8,207	7,778
Bereavement Grant	13,190	13,572	12,686	16,673	17,851	18,889	18,292
Total Expenditure	3,559,866	3,862,819	4,280,922	4,983,212	5,507,635	5,853,742	5,898,644

Table 2: Pensions Expenditure Outturn, 2011 to 2017

Expenditure (€000)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 Estimated Outturn
State Pension (Non Contributory)	971,769	963,211	952,457	954,411	972,206	982,138	994,742
State Pension (Contributory)	3,622,746	3,802,795	3,983,264	4,185,233	4,475,691	4,662,372	4,915,997

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Expenditure (€000)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 Estimated Outturn
State Pension (Transition)	132,395	146,629	137,270	73,768	1,185	245	0
Widows', Widowers'/ Surviving Civil Partners' Contributory	1,337,865	1,343,198	1,349,840	1,369,759	1,422,098	1,437,090	1,466,603
Widows', Widowers'/ Surviving Civil Partners' Death Benefit	7,977	7,827	7,775	8,068	8,248	8,594	9,371
Bereavement Grant	19,436	19,755	20,286	4,271	56	10	0
Total Expenditure Vote and SIF	6,092,188	6,283,415	6,450,892	6,595,510	6,879,484	7,090,449	7,386,713

In 2006, age-related pensions were replaced by State Pensions with significant administrative changes to several schemes. These alterations, implemented in stages following the introduction of the State Pension, resulted in substantial migrations of recipients between schemes with accompanying changes in expenditure and recipients on these schemes. The most significant transfers of recipients were those involving State Pension (Contributory) which was formerly known as the Old Age Pension (Contributory) and State Pension (Transition) which was formerly known as Retirement Pension.

Since 2006, recipients of Widow/Widower's Pension, Deserted Wife's Allowance, Blind Pension, and One-Parent Family Payment have transferred to State Pension (Non-Contributory) upon reaching 66 years of age, resulting in some decreases in recipients and expenditure on such schemes and associated increases on State Pension (Non-Contributory). Recipients of Invalidity Pension are now automatically transferred to State Pension (Contributory) at 66 years of age.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Data

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons with insufficient insurance contributions to meet the requirements for State pension purposes; the degree to which they may qualify for a means-tested or non-contributory pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2378/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rate of payment under the State Pension (Contributory) scheme is related to contributions paid over the years into the Social Insurance Fund, and credited contributions where applicable. There are a number of criteria which must be satisfied in order to qualify for a State pension contributory, whether at full or reduced level. These include that the person must be aged 66 or over, and that they have at least 520 paid contributions.

As the cohort of people who do not qualify for the State Pension (Contributory) will include people (both resident in the State and abroad) who do not apply for the State Pension (Contributory), the question of the number of persons with insufficient insurance contributions to meet the requirements for State pension purposes cannot be answered.

A person who does not qualify for State Pension (contributory) may apply for State Pension (non-contributory). Until a person applies for the State Pension (non-contributory) their means are not assessed. Therefore, in the absence of such an application, it is not possible to state to which degree they may/may not be entitled to a payment under that pension scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average length of time taken to deal with appeals in respect of disallowance of jobseeker's allowance, carer's allowance, disability allowance and other payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2379/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The average appeal processing times for all appeals determined from 2015 to 2017 broken down by all social welfare scheme types is outlined in the tables below.

Significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times improved between 2011 and 2016 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 24.1 weeks in 2016 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 17.6 weeks in 2016.

I understand from the Chief Appeals Officer that there has been a slight increase in processing times in 2017 with oral hearings taking, on average, 26.4 weeks and summary decisions taking 19.8 weeks to finalise. A number of factors have contributed to the increase including the retirement of six experienced Appeals Officers during the first half of 2017. However, she is hopeful that processing times will improve as a number of newly appointed Officers gain experience in their roles.

Specific actions taken to reduce processing times include liaising with HR to ensure that vacancies are filled quickly, ensuring that training is given to new Appeals Officers as early as possible and working with the Department to reduce the time in submitting appeal files.

It is open to an appellant to claim supplementary welfare allowance pending the outcome of their appeal if their means are insufficient to meet their needs.

The Chief Appeals Officer assures me that processing times are a priority. However, the drive for efficiency must be balanced with the competing demand to ensure that decisions are consistent and of high quality.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeals Processing Times by Scheme 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2015

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	21.1	30.7
Carers Allowance	20.6	25.9
Carers Benefit	19.7	21.8
Child Benefit	24.8	34.7
Disability Allowance	15.8	21.4
Illness Benefit	26.3	33.1
Partial Capacity Benefit	25.7	43.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	21.7	28.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	19.7	26.2
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	16.2
Farm Assist	21.0	28.6
Bereavement Grant	65.7	26.0
Death Benefit (Pension)	-	22.6

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-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Family Income Supplement	19.4	27.7
Invalidity Pension	26.2	28.4
Liabile Relatives	22.8	31.2
Maternity Benefit	22.6	17.5
One Parent Family Payment	22.9	33.9
State Pension (Contributory)	26.0	46.0
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.4	30.8
State Pension (Transition)	80.1	53.4
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.3	35.0
Disablement Pension	23.7	35.3
Incapacity Supplement	41.2	51.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	18.2	27.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.7	31.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	15.8	26.0
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.2	21.9
JA/JB Fraud Control	-	46.1
BTW Family Dividend	14.1	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	12.9	21.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	21.0	30.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	14.3	21.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	15.0	-
Treatment Benefit	17.9	-
Carer's Support Grant *	21.2	23.6
Insurability of Employment	47.6	69.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	13.1	23.5
Survivor's Pension (Con)	24.1	46.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.7	38.3
Widows Parent Grant	18.4	-
All Appeals	18.1	25.5

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2016

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	18.2	33.8
Carers Allowance	17.6	21.6
Carers Benefit	20.7	22.4
Child Benefit	22.1	38.2
Disability Allowance	14.6	20.1
Illness Benefit	27.2	34.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	27.3	33.6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.3	30.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.0	32.8
Farm Assist	21.9	26.0
Bereavement Grant	23.1	-

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Death Benefit (Pension)	19.7	-
Liabile Relatives	14.0	16.9
Family Income Supplement	20.4	25.5
Invalidity Pension	21.3	28.2
Maternity Benefit	18.9	21.7
One Parent Family Payment	21.7	31.9
State Pension (Contributory)	25.6	45.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	22.7	32.9
State Pension (Transition)	67.7	61.3
Occupational Injury Benefit	25.0	31.9
Disablement Pension	25.8	26.8
Incapacity Supplement	27.7	50.9
Guardian's Payment (Con)	15.8	24.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.4	23.3
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.7	25.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.0	20.9
BTW Family Dividend	21.0	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.0	22.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	32.5	31.6
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.0	27.2
Treatment Benefit	17.1	-
Carer's Support Grant *	18.1	23.3
Insurability of Employment	36.6	85.7
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	15.0	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	16.6	28.8
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	18.4	23.4
Widows Parent Grant	23.5	63.8
All Appeals	17.6	24.1

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01 January 2017- 31 December 2017

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	13.4	-
Blind Person's Pension	20.1	24.4
Carers Allowance	21.7	24.0
Carers Benefit	17.8	21.3
Child Benefit	22.8	32.4
Disability Allowance	17.3	24.1
Illness Benefit	28.0	30.6
Partial Capacity Benefit	33.3	35.7
Domiciliary Care Allowance	27.2	34.4
Deserted Wife's Benefit	13.1	27.7
Farm Assist	20.7	25.8
Bereavement Grant	15.1	-

Questions - Written Answers

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Family Income Supplement	22.9	34.6
Invalidity Pension	16.9	23.7
Liabile Relatives	25.3	24.0
Maternity Benefit	18.8	19.3
Paternity Benefit	18.3	-
One Parent Family Payment	26.1	34.7
State Pension (Contributory)	32.1	45.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	25.9	35.3
State Pension (Transition)	60.4	-
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.0	26.4
Disablement Pension	25.0	28.3
OIB-Medical Care	-	27.3
Incapacity Supplement	47.8	37.2
Guardian's Payment (Con)	23.7	27.0
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	16.0	23.1
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	19.6	27.3
Jobseeker's Allowance	18.3	24.8
BTW Family Dividend	19.8	27.5
Jobseeker's Transitional	22.1	23.2
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	27.4	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	20.6	24.2
Carer's Support Grant *	18.5	25.6
Treatment Benefit	14.0	-
Insurability of Employment	42.8	90.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16.4	25.8
Survivor's Pension (Con)	23.0	44.7
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.3	24.7
Widowed Parent Grant	19.5	-
All Appeals	19.8	26.4

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Supplementary Welfare Allowance

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the degree to which a hardship clause has been invoked in the course of dealing with various circumstances in which persons found themselves in serious financial difficulty on a monthly basis over the course of the past year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2380/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme is considered the “*safety net*” within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

Under the SWA scheme, my Department may award a basic weekly payment and/or a supplement to assist with ongoing or recurring costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. In addition, the Department can make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Details of the numbers of recipients of payments under the SWA scheme in December 2016 and 2017 are set out in the following tabular statement.

Any person who considers that they may have an entitlement to a payment under the SWA scheme should contact my Department's Community Welfare Service at their local Intreo centre.

If the Deputy has concerns in relation to a particular case, he should bring the details to the attention of my Department.

Tabular Statement

Recipients of SWA schemes at end 2016 and 2017

SWA Scheme	2016	2017
Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16,200	16,000
SWA Supplements (including Rent Supplement, Diet Supplement and Other Supplements)	56,600	43,200
ENPs (incl. UNPs) (number of payments issued)	100,100	103,500

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her preferred options to resolve the issue whereby women and some men fail to qualify for an adequate level of contributory State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2381/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are three main State pensions. Firstly, the State pension non-contributory is a means-tested pension funded from taxation. Secondly, the State pension contributory, which is not means-tested, is paid from the Social Insurance Fund, via the PRSI system. Thirdly, the Widows/Widowers Contributory Pension is available to some people over 66.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for the means-tested State pension non-contributory, which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate. Therefore, the State pension system ensures that those of State pension age do have an adequate standard of living, with a safety net under the non-contributory pension of €227 per week, plus additional payments such as Household Benefits, Fuel Allowance, and a Rent Allowance where required. While there is a means-test, there are generous disallowances which mean that over 70% of such pensioners qualify for that pension at the maximum rate. Therefore, people in receipt of reduced rate contributory pensions below the

98% rate would have significant additional means, over and above their State pension payment, as they would otherwise qualify for a non-contributory pension at a higher rate instead.

It is important to ensure those qualifying for the contributory pension, which is funded by the Social Insurance Fund and is based upon contributions to that fund, have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. Such contributory pensions, with rates of payment linked to contributions made into a fund, are the norm across the world, and underpin the PRSI system in this country. To ensure that people can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions, paid or credited, over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension contributory easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of his or her pension. Backdating it in respect of periods before its introduction in 1994 is estimated to cost €290 million per year, and this figure would rise at a faster rate than the overall cost of State pensions.

The State pension contributory rate bands introduced from September 2012 more closely reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person than those in place before that. The current rate bands still provide pensions to people which are very favourable in comparison with their level of contribution. For example, a person with only 20 years of contributions over nearly 50 years will still receive an 85% pension. It is estimated that, to revert to the previous bands with effect from January 2018, would result in an annual cost of well over €70 million extra in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 to €12 million extra each following year.

When all payments across the State pension system are taken into account, the difference in the average direct payment to men and women is approximately 1% in Ireland. This would be very low by European standards, and as a result CSO figures show that poverty levels among those over 66 are very low for both men and women, and are at parity. In the latest figures, the rate of Consistent Poverty for men over 66 was 1.79% for men and 1.36% for women, compared to 8.3% for the general population.

I committed to examine in depth various options that may provide some relief to those who would have a higher contributory pension had the rate bands not been amended in 2012. Officials in my Department have completed a report on this matter, which I intend to bring to a cabinet committee later this week. Following that meeting, and subject to any necessary amendment or further discussions, I will then bring the report to Government for consideration.

I expect to start a consultation process shortly with stakeholders on the introduction of a Total Contributions Approach to replace the yearly average approach to State Pension calculation. Thereafter, a proposal to Government will be made.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 226 answered with Question No. 44.

Departmental Staff

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if adequate staff are available throughout the various sectors of her Department to ensure the expeditious of applications. [2383/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deputy will be aware that my Department, like all government departments, must operate within the staffing budget and headcount determined by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. In that context, the staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed. This takes account of workloads, management priorities and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

Live Register Data

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which she has identified specific trends arising from the study of the age profile of those on the live register; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2384/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Measures of unemployment from the QNHS are based on International Labour Office (ILO) definitions. To be 'ILO unemployed' a person must in the week before the survey be without work but available for work and have recently taken specific job-search steps. The Live Register, which captures those registering for unemployment benefits (including those working part-time and in casual work who draw partial unemployment payments), is an administrative record. It is not the official measure of unemployment, but can give indicative trends. My Department uses both Live Register and QNHS data for reporting and monitoring trends and adjusting policies accordingly at national level.

This includes providing data and trends broken down by age categories and by duration of unemployment. The QNHS data, being prepared as part of the EU-wide Labour Force Survey, also allow Irish trends to be compared with international developments.

The Pathways to Work strategy, the key document setting out policy to facilitate the unemployed of all ages back into work, is underpinned by analyses of the labour market situation based on the statistical sources mentioned above.

By allocating activation resources to persons on the Live Register, the government's policy tends automatically to focus on those areas and age-groups in which unemployment is most concentrated. The focus on those most in need is further reinforced by the use of profiling to identify, among the newly unemployed, those most likely to face severe difficulties in re-entering employment. People identified as having a low PEX (probability of exit from unemployment) score are prioritised for intensive engagement and support from the Intreo employment service

In addition, the Youth Guarantee initiative is specifically aimed at those aged under 25 who are unemployed with specific targeting of those who are either long-term unemployed or are most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

Summary statistical information on the clients' age, duration of unemployment, and last held occupation together with other demographic and regional information is published on the Central Statistics Office website.

Question No. 229 answered with Question No. 32.

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the degree to which back to work and back to education supports will be reviewed with a view to maximising their availability; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2386/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme enables my Department to work with people who have found themselves dependent on the welfare system for various reasons but who have an idea or have identified an opportunity to start their own business.

In 2017, a review of the BTWEA scheme was released. Overall, the review found that the scheme offers effective support for people who are long-term unemployed and who are interested in self-employment as a route to entering the labour market. The scheme plays a useful role in supporting the development of new enterprises.

Research demonstrated that the numbers returning from self-employment to the Live Register, after participating on the scheme, are low. Based on the comparison of the BTWEA participants to a control group of similar jobseekers who did not choose the scheme as an option, the BTWEA participant was over twice as likely to remain off the Live Register six months after the payments on the scheme had ceased. This trend continues when examined following an 18 month period after the payments ceasing.

One of the amendments following the review was the participants who take up self-employment are able to access the BTWEA after 9 months, down from 12 months. This enables access to the supports to those wishing to commence self-employment at an earlier stage of their unemployment.

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is an educational opportunities scheme for persons in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments wishing to pursue second or third level courses of education in order to improve their employment prospects. It is primarily designed to support second chance education.

Entitlement to BTEA is conditional on a person having an on-going entitlement to the qualifying scheme payment. The BTEA scheme has been amended in recent years to ensure that the conditions are in line with the qualifying payment and consistent with the rules governing student grants funding through SUSI. Changes were introduced over the past number of years followed a review carried out on employment supports schemes in 2012. Stakeholders were also afforded an opportunity to contribute to the proposed recommendations at that time.

Overall, the priority for my Department is that the BTEA scheme remains focused, targeted and suitable for the needs of jobseekers and of the future skills needs of the economy.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Fraud

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which anti-fraud initiatives have yielded revenue to the extent anti-

pated; if extra costs have been incurred by the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2387/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The majority of people in receipt of a payment from my Department receive what they are entitled to. Nevertheless, my Department recognises that abuse of the welfare system is an ongoing reality and must be tackled proactively. Anti-fraud and control measures are set out in the Department's Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014 – 2018 and are designed to prevent and detect fraud, to ensure effective oversight of schemes, to pursue prosecution of offenders and the recovery of any overpaid entitlements identified. The Strategy and annual reports on implementation is published on the Department's website – www.welfare.ie. The report for 2017 is expected to be published in early April 2018.

While data for 2017 is currently being compiled and verified, provisional indications are that the target set for last year for control savings of €510 million will be met. It is estimated that for 2017, as a whole, some €111 million in overpayments were recorded (compared to just over €110 million in 2016). Of this, some €38.3 million related to 10,500 cases of suspected fraud. The value of overpayments recovered during 2017 is estimated at approximately €82 million - similar to the level recovered in 2016. The Department's Prosecution Service and Special Investigations Unit considered nearly 300 cases for prosecution during 2017 which is also similar to the previous year.

Control and anti-fraud activities are an integral part of the functions of all staff and systems of the Department. No additional costs were incurred during the year on these activities. During 2017, the Department funded an awareness campaign to highlight its anti-fraud activities and the role members of the public can play in reporting potential fraudulent activity. The cost of the campaign before VAT was €163,000. Control savings arising from the campaign continue to accrue and will be included in the overall figures for 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Support Services

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which FIS or other support payments continue to be made available to families living on uneconomic holdings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2388/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The main support my Department offers to families living on uneconomic holdings is the farm assist scheme which provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. The farm assist scheme is a means tested payment and the means test is flexible so as to allow for significant income fluctuations from one year to the next. It may also be noted that farm assist customers continue to receive more beneficial treatment than other self-employed persons.

Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2018 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of approximately €74.1 million on the farm assist scheme.

Farm Assist recipients will benefit from the following measures which I provided for in Budget 2018; the €5 per week increase in the maximum weekly rates of payment, proportionate

increases in weekly payments for qualified adults and a €2 per week increase for each qualified child. In addition, farm assist recipients are eligible to avail of the 250 additional places on the Rural Social Scheme which I announced as part of the Budget 2018 package.

The Working Family Payment (WFP), formerly known as Family Income Supplement, or FIS, is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings. The WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants, and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment.

To qualify for payment of the WFP, a person must be engaged in insurable employment which is expected to last for at least three months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. Therefore, self-employed people are not eligible for the WFP. However, where the spouse/partner of the farmer is in insurable employment, they may qualify for WFP/FIS, subject to meeting the criteria outlined above.

Other support payments offered by my Department include the jobseeker's benefit (JB) and jobseeker's allowance (JA) schemes which provide income support for people who have lost work and who are available for and genuinely seeking full-time employment. Jobseeker's allowance is a means tested social assistance payment whereas jobseeker's benefit is a contribution based insurance scheme.

To qualify for jobseeker's benefit a person must be unemployed, be available for and genuinely seeking work, have had a substantial loss of employment and as a result be unemployed for at least 4 days out of 7. The jobseeker's benefit scheme provides significant support to individuals who can work up to 3 days a week and receive a jobseeker's payment.

I am satisfied that the combination of the jobseekers schemes, the working family payment and the farm assist scheme provide adequate income support options for families living on un-economic holdings.

Legislative Measures

233. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of the provisions in the promised Bill to tackle insecure low-hour contracts and bogus self-employment. [2132/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 7 December last year, I published the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 in response to the commitment in the current Programme for Government to tackle problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work.

The proposed legislation aims to improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and those working variable hours. The Bill has a particular focus on low-paid, more vulnerable workers. It provides for five key issues:

- Ensuring that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and, in particular, their core terms at an early stage of their employment.
- Strengthening the provisions around minimum payments to low-paid, vulnerable workers who may be called in to work for a period but not provided with that work.
- Prohibiting zero hours contracts in most circumstances.
- Ensuring that employees on low hour contracts, who consistently work more hours each

week than provided for in their contracts of employment, are entitled to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the reality of the hours they have worked over an extended period.

- Strengthening the anti-victimisation provisions for employees who try to invoke a right under the Bill.

I look forward to working with all sides of both Houses of the Oireachtas so that this important Bill may be progressed as expeditiously as possible over the coming months.

Separately to this Bill, a working group from my Department, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners have compiled a report on the use of ‘disguised–employment’ such as intermediary employment structures and certain self-employment arrangements. My Department is concerned that such mechanisms are being used to reduce the amount of PRSI and tax being paid with a subsequent loss to the Exchequer and the Social Insurance Fund. The Minister for Finance and I are considering the report with a view to its publication in the near future.

Planning Issues

234. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the damage to upland landscapes by the construction of onshore industrial wind turbines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2188/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are required to take account of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines for Planning Authorities, which were issued as statutory guidance by the Minister under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, when considering planning applications or appeals in respect of proposed wind energy developments. Chapters 3 and 6 of the Guidelines provide planning guidance for planning authorities on the assessment of the impact of wind energy projects on the landscape, when making a development plan and as part of development management.

An environmental impact assessment (EIA) must also be undertaken before a decision is made on a planning application or appeal in respect of a wind energy development comprising more than 5 turbines or having a power output greater than 5 megawatts. Appropriate assessment of the likely adverse effects of the proposed development on designated sites of particular environmental importance may also be required.

These processes and requirements are aimed at ensuring that all potential environmental impacts, including landscape impacts, of a proposed development are fully considered and taken into account prior to a decision being made on an individual planning application or appeal. In addition, a decision to grant permission for development may include conditions to mitigate environmental impacts of the construction process and the environmental effects of the development as identified under EIA. Furthermore, planning authorities have extensive powers under Part VIII of the 2000 Act to ensure that development is carried out in accordance with the terms and conditions of the planning permission concerned.

Separate from the planning process, it is understood that the forthcoming Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework currently being progressed by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment will identify a limited number of areas suitable for the development of wind energy projects of scale, having regard to the protection of natural and cultural heritage, landscape and amenity.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

235. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review the criteria in respect of the local authority housing loan scheme in order to take into account the difficulties facing many persons (details supplied). [2144/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authority house purchase loan finance continues to be made available to first time buyers only. The Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012 are kept under on-going review and there are no plans, at this time, to alter the scope of the Regulations to include non-first time buyers.

The option currently available for non-first time buyers is to seek home loan facilities from one of the commercial lending institutions.

Vacant Sites Data

236. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of sites that have been entered in every city and council vacant sites register from 1 January 2017 to 1 January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2184/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

Planning authorities are presently engaging in the necessary preparatory work, prior to the application of the levy with effect from January 2019 in respect of sites identified on the register in 2018. As required under the Act, this includes the identification of specific vacant sites for entry on the register as well as the registered owners of the sites in question along with undertaking a site valuation.

My Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their functional area. On foot of a recent review of the online vacant site registers across all local authority areas, I understand that there is collectively over 180 sites on the registers.

My Department continues to monitor and engage with local authorities in relation to the implementation of the vacant site levy and as recently as 8 November 2017 held a seminar with authorities in this regard.

Planning Issues

237. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment if he will request local authorities to make documentation in respect of planning applications available online in a timely fashion; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Dublin City Council considers this a courtesy service thus resulting in documents being made available late; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2214/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Under current planning legislation, namely the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the 2000 Act) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2017, the processing of planning applications is based primarily on physical documents. While planning authorities endeavour to upload on-line as soon as possible the principal planning documents that are required to be made available in hard copy for public inspection and purchase, there is no statutory requirement for them to do so.

Amendments to the 2000 Act to facilitate the introduction of eplanning (electronic planning) across the local authority sector and in An Bord Pleanála have been incorporated in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which is progressing through the Oireachtas (currently at Dáil Report Stage). When enacted and supplemented by necessary supporting regulations, this will allow the making available on-line of planning applications and appeals and submissions in relation to them, and also the on-line payment of associated fees. In this context, the aim will be to ensure that planning documents are made available on-line at the same time as they are made available for viewing in hard copy by members of the public.

Local Authority Finances

238. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities have received, or are in the process of receiving, debt write offs on loans they acquired under the land aggregation scheme; the local authorities which have received debt write offs on such loans, in tabular form; and the process for the application of debt write offs under the scheme. [2219/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Land Aggregation Scheme was introduced in 2010 as part of revised arrangements for the funding of land for housing purposes. The primary purpose of the Scheme was to assist in the gradual unwinding of loans taken out by housing authorities to purchase land for the social and affordable housing investment programme.

Local authorities were invited to apply to my Department to recoup the cost of outstanding loans on housing land, where these loans were due to mature and where it was considered unlikely that land would be developed in the short to medium term. The application process required a formal submission by the local authority, including confirmation of having complied with the requirements under Section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, in respect of notifying members of intention to dispose of land.

An initial appraisal of the land, to determine its suitability for inclusion in the scheme, was carried out by the Housing Agency, as well as a due diligence assessment. Subject to available funding, my Department discharged the loans and the sites transferred to the ownership of the Housing Agency.

Applications to the value of some €163 million in loans were accepted into the Land Aggregation Scheme. The figure of €163 million includes €111 million in respect of loans which were fully redeemed by local authorities with funding recouped from my Department, under the original terms of the Scheme.

The remaining €52 million accepted into the Land Aggregation Scheme is in the form of annuity loans, for which local authorities are making repayments to the Housing Finance Agency. Such annuity repayments are recoupable from my Department, subject to the local authority complying with terms of the Scheme.

Local authorities were advised of the discontinuance of the Scheme, in respect of new applications, in 2013.

The land involved continues to be available for housing and was included on the Rebuilding Ireland land mapping exercise.

Details of the sites accepted into the Land Aggregation Scheme are set out in the following tables.

Table 1: Sites accepted under the first phase of the Scheme (Loan capital & interest fully redeemed).

Previous Owner	Location	Value of Loan accepted into the scheme (Capital & Interest)	Size of Site
		[€]	[ha]
Carlow County Council	Tinryland	499,835	1.9
Carlow County Council	Slate Row, Hacketstown	611,677	3.2
Clare County Council	Lisdoonvarna	2,189,982	4.4
Cork County Council	Meelin	115,032	1.6
Cork County Council	Oakwood, Macroom	1,126,472	2.3
Cork County Council	Colleras, Goleen	348,337	0.5
Cork County Council	Knocknagree	241,595	1.3
Cork County Council	Lombardstown	152,184	1.3
Cork County Council	The Slip, Bantry,	2,788,750	13.5
Cork County Council	Carrigtwohill	1,474,014	2
Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown County Council	Enniskerry Road, Sandyford	10,257,875	2.8
Fingal County Council	Hampton, Balbriggan	26,479,174	24.2
Galway City Council	Ballymoneen Road, Ballyburke	7,006,412	2.5
Kildare County Council	Kildare, Brallistown	1,929,294	4.0
Kildare County Council	Nurney	829,896	4.2
Kildare County Council	Clane	3,595,901	8.5
Kildare County Council	Naas, Craddockstown	4,750,580	7.9
Laois County Council	Castletown	111,392	1.5
Laois County Council	Portlaoise Road, Mountrath	849,818	3.1
Laois County Council	Golflinks Road Rathdowney	342,669	2
Laois County Council	Adj. to Cemetery Ballinakill	178,188	1.3
Laois County Council	Woodbrook, Mountrath	370,383	1.7
Limerick County Council	Glin	124,123	0.5
Limerick County Council	Ballyhahill	54,466	1.2
Limerick County Council	Mountcollins	135,694	1.5
Limerick County Council	Knocklong	434,019	3.5
Limerick County Council	Bruff	229,899	2.1
Mallow Town Council	St Joseph's Road, Mallow	3,877,077	5.3
Meath County Council	Townparks Kells	2,516,242	4.4
Naas Town Council	Naas Devoy Barracks	11,522,100	5.6

Previous Owner	Location	Value of Loan accepted into the scheme (Capital & Interest)	Size of Site
National Building Agency	Cartontroy-Kilnafaddoge & Lissywollen, Athlone	4,167,544	5.5
National Building Agency	Tullow Road, Carlow	3,327,875	2
Offaly County Council	Shinrone	371,847	2.9
Sligo County Council	Ballintogher	274,344	1.3
Sligo County Council	Tubbercurry	34,062	0.2
Sligo County Council	Lisnalurg	4,828,276	11.8
Tralee Town Council	Ballyard, Tralee	5,585,790	8.3
Waterford County Council	Townpark East, Tallow	871,053	4.3
Waterford City Council	Gibbet Hill	1,620,215	2.9
Wexford County Council	Creagh B Demesne, Gorey	270,933	0.7
Wexford County Council	Ballyowen, Ramsfort Park Gorey	701,448	1
Wexford County Council	Hospital Hill, Bunclody	1,252,881	4.4
Wexford County Council	Parish Field, Bunclody	283,233	0.7
Wexford County Council	Taghmon, Wexford	829,214	3.4
Wexford County Council	Carrick on Bannow	111,339	0.5
Wicklow Town Council	Hillview, Ballynerrin, Wicklow Town	1,390,145	2.9
	Total	€ 111,063,279	172.6 ha

Table 2: Sites accepted under the second phase of the Scheme (Annuity repayments recoupable from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government).

Local Authority	Location	Value of Loan accepted into the scheme (Capital & Interest)	Size of Site
		[€]	[ha]
Carlow County Council	Royal Oak Road, Bagenalstown	50,484*	0.11
Carlow County Council	Paupish	960,510	2.2
Cork County Council	Dripsey	708,517	1.295
Cork County Council	Cloughmacsimon, Bandon	3,006,467	3.63
Cork County Council	Duntahane Rd, Fermoy	3,535,156	3.98
Cork County Council	The Miles. Clonakilty	1,066,686	2.464
Cork County Council	Stag Park, Mitchelstown	3,781,435	8.59
Cork County Council	Barrack Rd, Youghal	1,136,077	1.16
Cork County Council	Townsend St, Skibbereen	253,467	0.13
Cork County Council	Union Hall	622,233	1.403
Dundalk Town Council	Mount Avenue	4,158,868	3.09
Fingal County Council	Garristown	1,554,333	2.77
Fingal County Council	Hackettstown	7,285,629	7.3
Laois County Council	Abbeyleix Rd	1,383,355	1.491
Laois County Council	Derry Rd Durrow	554,089	1.0281
Laois County Council	Old Knockmay Rd Portlaoise	2,067,744	1.031
Laois County Council	Bride St Ballinakill	340,360	0.92
Laois County Council	Doonane	123,158	0.7405
Laois County Council	Golfinks Rd (2)	1,243,534	2.132
Limerick County Council	Cappamore	99,397	1.25

Local Authority	Location	Value of Loan accepted into the scheme (Capital & Interest)	Size of Site
		[€]	[ha]
Offaly County Council	Kilcormac	622,331	1.2165
Sligo Borough Council	Ballindoe	8,830,267	15.1753
Tullamore Town Council	Collins Lane	4,836,978	4.34
Wexford County Council	Campile Ballykerogue	236,635	0.76
Wexford County Council	Castlemoyle A&B New Ross	3,744,513	5.96
	Total	€ 52,202,222	74.1664 ha

*Royal Oak Road, Bagenalstown was accepted under the second phase of the scheme. However given the loan amount involved, €50,484, it was decided that it would be more efficient and effective to redeem the loan in full. Accordingly no interest payment arises in relation to that site.

Departmental Schemes

239. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the rural cottage scheme will re-open. [2279/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities have a number of options available to them in meeting social housing needs. These include, if they consider it appropriate, 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 understand that the scheme referred to by the Deputy was of this type.

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 of a site. However, the actual operation of such an approach to social housing provision continues to be a matter for the relevant local authority concerned.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

240. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2293/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's overall key priorities in terms of capital investment in the period to 2027 include:

- social housing delivery and regeneration;
- output of housing generally, supported by targeted infrastructural investment;
- investment in our water services infrastructure through Irish Water and rural water programmes;
- supporting sustainable growth in our urban areas and through our regions through urban renewal programmes; and

- capital investment in other local authority programmes funded by my Department in areas like fire safety and supporting the critical role played by Met Éireann in ensuring we have effective and resilient weather forecasting and emergency management systems.

Engagements in relation to future capital investment in the context of the capital plan are continuing between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. These engagements are also being used to ensure effective alignment between the capital plan and the National Planning Framework, with the intention to finalise and publish both together in the coming weeks.

Departmental Data

241. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in his Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in his Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2319/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There have been two complaints of bullying lodged by staff members in my Department since 2011. There have been no sexual harassment claims in the period in question. These cases were investigated fully under the “Positive Working Environment Policy” which was the Anti-Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying Policy for the Civil Service in operation at the time. Following the investigation neither complaint was upheld.

Year	Bullying	Sexual Harassment
2011	0	0
2012	2	0
2013	0	0
2014	0	0
2015	0	0
2016	0	0
2017	0	0
2018*	0	0

* to date

The Civil Service is committed to protecting the dignity and respect of staff across all organisations. The Civil Service policy ‘Dignity At Work’ was developed in partnership between Civil Service management and the Staff Panel of Unions. The policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety and equality in the workplace. The policy has been brought to the attention of all staff and is available on my Department’s intranet. A copy of the policy can be found at the following link: <http://hr.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/here.pdf>.

Social and Affordable Housing

242. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the policy of the removal of staged payments to small and medium sized developers of new social housing under Rebuilding Ireland will be reinstated or alternatively if a bridging finance scheme can be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[2325/18]

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

The large majority of social housing projects initiated by local authorities are implemented through standard contracts for public works, following a competitive tendering process. Contractors in such cases are paid on a staged basis as the project advances.

Local authorities may also acquire social housing either through acquisitions of second-hand or newly completed houses, or through turnkey developments. In these circumstances payment is made on delivery, which has been the approach utilised for a number of years. However, options do exist for local authorities to agree staged delivery with developers. Where suitable, this can facilitate the early delivery of completed housing and earlier payments to the developer.

Housing Provision

243. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the proposed provision of €25 million over 2018 and 2019 to unlock local authority owned lands specifically for affordable models such as co-operative schemes; the progress that has been made in developing models of affordable housing and co-operatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2371/18]

244. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the advice which can be given to co-operative housing bodies such as an organisation (details supplied) that wishes to meet with local authorities and present proposals for a co-operative housing project in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown area in view of the fact that as yet no process exists for such proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2372/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 243 and 244 together.

Recognising that housing affordability is a major issue for some households and that while initiatives introduced to date are having an impact and will have a greater impact in time, the Government considers that a further package of targeted measures focused on addressing affordability is needed to enable low- to moderate-income households, that do not qualify for social housing supports, to purchase or rent homes, particularly in Dublin and other major urban areas.

This will include, but will not be limited to, the deployment of €25 million Exchequer funding, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned lands specifically for affordable housing and further measures in relation to improving the viability of apartment development. Having consulted with relevant local authorities, my Department is currently developing the criteria for accessing the Fund and I expect to be in a position make a call for proposals to local authorities in the near future.

In the interim, prior to any further affordability measures being finalised, I encourage approved housing bodies, local authorities, industry professionals and banks to work together in a collaborative and proactive way to frame proposals, so that optimum delivery of much needed affordable homes will be achieved from the Fund without delay.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

245. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her

key priorities in the forthcoming capital review; the projects submitted for priority inclusion in the review; the status of negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2286/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Report of the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan: Building on Recovery 2016-2021 was published in September 2017. Details of the priority projects and programmes for my Department are outlined in the report prepared by my Department as part of the review process which is available on the website of the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/submissions-to-the-review-of-the-capital-plan/>

In addition, a new 10 year National Investment Plan, in support of the new National Planning Framework Ireland 2040, is to be published by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform with a view to sustaining national economic and social progress over the longer term. As deliberations are still ongoing in relation to this Plan, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Departmental Data

246. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if bullying or sexual harassment claims have been lodged in her Department in each year since 2011; if so, the number of either complaints on an annual basis, in tabular form; if these complaints have been investigated; the outcome of each investigation; and the policies in place in her Department to combat bullying and sexual harassment. [2312/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that in 2012, there was a bullying complaint investigated and upheld in my Department. Appropriate action was taken and an agreed protocol was put in place between the parties.

Everyone in my Department is entitled to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness in the workplace. My Department is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation. I am assured that the Dignity at Work Policy – an anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy for the Irish Civil Service, which came into effect in February 2015, is implemented. The key aims of this policy are to:

- achieve a work environment where dignity and respect are to the forefront of our values
- create an environment where bullying, harassment and sexual harassment are not tolerated in any form
- ensure that each individual is aware of his/her responsibility to behave in a way that reflects a culture of dignity and respect.

The policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace. Every member of staff in my Department is made aware that all forms of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment are unacceptable and every member of staff has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner.