

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 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Permanent Structured Co-operation

9. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Ireland's triple-lock will apply to all joint military development or procurement initiatives which Ireland undertakes with other countries under PESCO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3133/18]

21. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he plans to publish Ireland's national implementation plan for Permanent Structured Co-operation; if this plan will be voted on in Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3354/18]

23. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if discussions took place prior to Ireland joining PESCO between his Department, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney General regarding the constitutionality of Ireland's involvement in PESCO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3363/18]

24. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the impact of increased defence spending as a result of the decision to join PESCO, particularly in relation to public services. [3176/18]

31. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the increase in defence expenditure that is envisaged as part of Ireland's obligations following the joining of Permanent Structured Co-operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3353/18]

37. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the triple-lock will be used to ensure that multi-country military procurement which Ireland participates in or financially contributes to under PESCO is approved by the Cabinet, agreed by Dáil Éireann and subject to a UN mandate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3134/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 9, 21, 23, 24, 31 and 37 together.

Under the Defence Acts, the deployment of the Defence Forces overseas on peacekeeping missions requires the approval of the Government and Dáil Éireann and the specific mission must be authorised by the United Nations Security Council. This is what is termed the "triple-lock". The United Nations Security Council has the primary role in relation to the maintenance of international peace and security, and in authorising peacekeeping operations to this end. However, neither the UN nor the UN Security Council have any role in mandating what or

how States develop or procure military capability and equipment. As such, the “Triple- Lock” does not and cannot apply to Ireland’s participation in PESCO projects.

The Department of Foreign Affairs was consulted and fully engaged in all aspects of the PESCO decision. The Attorney General confirmed that there was no legal or constitutional impediment to Ireland participating in PESCO once Government and Dáil Éireann approval were obtained in accordance with the provisions of the Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009.

Pursuant to Section 3 (1) of the 2009 Act, both the Government and Dáil Éireann approved Ireland’s participation in PESCO. There is no specific requirement to seek further approval for any joint capability development or procurement initiatives which Ireland may pursue under PESCO. That said, I will of course update the House on continuing developments on CSDP in the normal course which will include our participation in PESCO projects.

Expenditure allocations for all Departments, both current (2018-2020) and capital (2018-2021), were published as part of the Budget documentation. It is expected that any investment or expenditure on defence, including that arising from Ireland’s participation in PESCO, will be met from within these allocations. As such, PESCO will not result in a requirement for additional expenditure beyond the approved allocations nor is it expected to impact on any other areas of public expenditure.

I have already arranged for the key PESCO documents and Ireland’s notification to be lodged in the Dáil Library. In relation to Ireland’s National Implementation Plans (NIP), this is currently in draft form and finalisation depends on further Council Decisions on PESCO Projects and governance expected in the coming months. Once finalised, probably in mid-2018, consideration can then be given to its publication.

Defence Forces Recruitment

10. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding Defence Forces recruitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3254/18]

42. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the numbers serving in the Permanent Defence Force at the end of 2017; the projected number of enlisted personnel for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3357/18]

43. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he expects the Permanent Defence Force numbers to reach the agreed ceiling of 9,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3457/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 10, 42 and 43 together.

The Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

To achieve this, there is significant on-going recruitment. In 2017 some 751 new personnel were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force, comprising of General Service Recruits, Cadets and specialists for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. As of the 31st of December 2017, the strength of the Permanent Defence Force stood at 9,173 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) personnel.

In 2018, similar recruitment will take place and plans for this are currently being finalised. At this point it is not possible to predict precise numbers that will be recruited but it is anticipated that this will be in the region of 800 personnel.

Certain specialist posts such as Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers and certain Technicians are presenting challenges for recruitment and retention. I have previously acknowledged this fact, which is reflective of the current economic circumstances and attractive job opportunities in the private and commercial semi-state sectors. The extensive professional training that such specialists receive within the Defence Forces makes such personnel very attractive within these sectors. This is not a unique challenge for the Defence forces and is also faced by military forces elsewhere.

The Public Service Pay Commission is further examining the issue of the recruitment and retention of specialist personnel within the Defence Forces, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 – 2020. The Department of Defence is currently preparing a submission on recruitment and retention.

In addition to the ongoing development of specialists within the PDF, I am also addressing specialist vacancies with a range of recruitment methods including direct entry competitions for certain specialist positions. The scope to further expand direct entry is being considered. I have also directed civil and military management to develop proposals to facilitate former PDF personnel with appropriate skill-sets to re-enter the Defence Forces.

Following acceptance by the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, the pay increases available under the Lansdowne Road agreement were applied to the Defence Forces. I was delighted that both PDFORRA and RACO have also signed up to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which is an extension of the Lansdowne Road agreement. This provides for further pay increase of between 6.2% and 7.4% over its lifetime.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment of capable personnel, developing serving personnel, and so achieving the best personnel and skills combination to ensure the Defence Forces retain the capacity to operate effectively across all roles.

Question No. 11 answered orally.

Common Security and Defence Policy

12. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the increased EU-NATO co-operation supported by recent European Council meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3355/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Sharing strategic interests and facing similar security challenges, NATO and the European Union cooperate on issues of common interest, particularly in the areas of crisis management and capability development. A key focus of this cooperation is to avoid duplication of effort in the development of military capabilities and in structures, systems and interoperability standards. Cooperation across both organisations also ensures maximum synergy where both are deployed in the same theatre, for example in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. In the face of new and emerging security challenges, in particular cyber, transnational crime, international terrorism, cooperation is essential in developing an effective and comprehensive response to these more complex security challenges.

In 2017, work continued on a Common Set of Proposals for the implementation of the Joint

Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation. This declaration was made on 8th July 2016 by the Presidents of the European Council and European Commission, together with the NATO Secretary General. The declaration highlights areas where the EU and NATO can further strengthen cooperation. These focus on cooperation in the key areas of Countering Hybrid Threats, Operational Cooperation including maritime issues, Cyber security and defence, Defence capabilities, Defence Industry and Research, Exercises and capacity building.

On 14 June 2017, the EU and NATO issued a joint progress report on the progress of implementation on the Common Set of Proposals. A further set of new additional proposals building on the key areas set out above were agreed on 05 December 2017, including new topics, such as counter-terrorism, military mobility and women, peace and security. In conclusions from 14 December 2017 the European Council requested that work proceed on implementing the full set of proposals on EU-NATO cooperation, including the additional ones agreed in December 2017.

Ireland welcomes greater EU-NATO co-operation where it contributes to international peace and security and is focused on avoiding duplication of structures, systems and interoperability standards. This ensures better coherence and effectiveness on the ground in peace support and crisis management operations.

NATO and the EU currently have twenty two member countries in common but yet it is important to note that the 2016 declaration confirms that EU-NATO cooperation will fully respect the decision making autonomy of both organisations, and will not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of any Member States. This is a strong acknowledgement that Ireland's policy of neutrality and non-NATO membership will in no way be affected by enhanced cooperation.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

13. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of technical grade vacancies that exist across the Defence Forces; his plans to fill them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3351/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

To achieve this, there is significant on-going recruitment. In 2017 some 751 new personnel were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force, comprising of General Service Recruits, Cadets and specialists for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. As of the 31st of December 2017, the strength of the Permanent Defence Force stood at 9,173 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) personnel.

There are approximately 4,400 appointments in the establishment for enlisted ranks that attract technical pay. These are graded on a scale of 1- 6 in order of the expertise required and range from higher graded appointments encompassing highly specialised positions such as radar technicians (Tech 6) to lower graded appointments encompassing positions such as stores clerks (Tech 1).

The military authorities have been requested to provide the information sought but were unable to do so in the timeframe for answering the question. I will revert to the Deputy when the

information becomes available.

Other specialist posts such as Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers and certain technical posts are presenting challenges for recruitment and retention. I have previously acknowledged this fact, which is reflective of the current economic circumstances and attractive job opportunities in the private and commercial semi-state sectors. The extensive professional training that such specialists receive within the Defence Forces makes such personnel very attractive within these sectors. This is not a unique challenge for Ireland and is also faced by military forces elsewhere.

The Public Service Pay Commission is further examining the issue of the recruitment and retention of specialist personnel within the Defence Forces, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 – 2020. The Department of Defence is currently preparing a submission in this regard.

I am addressing the issue of specialist vacancies throughout the Permanent Defence Force with a range of recruitment methods, including direct entry competitions for certain specialist positions. The scope to further expand direct entry is being considered. I have also directed civil and military management to develop proposals to facilitate former PDF personnel with appropriate skill-sets to re-enter the Defence Forces.

Following acceptance by the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, the pay increases available under the Lansdowne Road agreement were applied to the Defence Forces. I was delighted that both PDFORRA and RACO have also signed up to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which is an extension of the Lansdowne Road agreement. This provides for further pay increase of between 6.2% and 7.4% over its lifetime.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment of capable personnel, developing serving personnel, and so achieving the best personnel and skills combination to ensure the Defence Forces retain the capacity to operate effectively across all roles.

Defence Forces Pensions

14. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason in circumstances in which there has been no change to the conditions upon which his Department agreed to pay a supplementary pension he has not addressed the situation in a timeframe and manner similar to the measures approved for other public servants. [3454/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I take it the Deputy is referring to the absence of the concept of “supplementary pensions” from the provisions of the single public service pension scheme.

As I indicated in my response to recent Questions, the occupational pension scheme terms of post-1 January 2013 new entrants to the public service, including the Permanent Defence Force, are governed by the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012. All first-time new entrants to pensionable public service employment on or after that date are members of the Single Scheme. Under the 2012 Act, overall statutory responsibility for the Single Scheme pension terms and rules rests with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Single Scheme is a key structural fiscal reform introduced to help significantly reduce the cost of public service pensions in the long term through far-reaching transformation of the public service pension system. Given that financial imperative, the terms and rules of the Single

Scheme, which are fundamentally different to previous superannuation public service arrangements, make no provision for the concept or award of supplementary pensions for any new entrants joining any public service group from that date onwards.

Some years before the introduction of the new Single Scheme, the Department of Defence and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform had put sectoral pension agreements in place with PDFORRA and RACO in respect of PDF personnel serving at the time. These pre-2013 sectoral agreements include specific provision for supplementary pensions for officers who joined the PDF from 6 April 1995, as well as enlisted personnel who joined from 1 April 2004. The Single Scheme does not impact on those pre-2013 sectoral agreements. However, by virtue of the provisions of the 2012 Act, those pre-2013 sectoral agreements have no application to PDF members of the Single Scheme.

The absence from the Single Scheme of provision for the concept of supplementary pensions for any new entrants joining any public service group – including the PDF – on or after 1st January 2013, has been confirmed by the Official Side to the Defence Forces Representative Associations.

Moreover, I am advised that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has recently reiterated that position stating, among other things, that there are no plans for the introduction of supplementary pensions under the Single Scheme. My Department is not aware of any change in that position for any affected Single Scheme occupation in the public service.

A claim for payment of the supplementary pension to post-1 January 2013 new entrants has been received under the Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) Scheme for members of the PDF. The Deputy will appreciate that as discussions under the C&A scheme are confidential to the parties involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time.

Industrial Relations

15. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the review of the conciliation and arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3156/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I said in the course of a reply to a question earlier, I have appointed Mr. Gerard Barry as independent chairperson for the review of the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. I am satisfied that Gerard Barry is not only independent but also has vast experience in the area of industrial relations and public service employment.

The C and A scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force has been in operation since the early 1990's. and has operated in agreement between all parties since then. However, there have been many changes in the industrial relations landscape in the intervening period. I consider it timely and appropriate to conduct a fundamental review of the scheme to ensure that it remains efficient and effective for all parties.

I have given detailed consideration to a number of possible approaches to the review and the issues that require to be considered. In the course of the review, the chairperson will seek input from the parties to the scheme. These are Department of Defence/Defence Forces management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, PDFORRA and RACO. There will also be wider consultation with relevant stakeholders.

I have directed that the Chairperson provide a report to me no later than six months from the start of the review, which is due to commence shortly.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

16. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department has reviewed the recent settlement in a Defence Forces lariam damages case and is giving consideration to a redress and compensation scheme for members of the Defence Forces harmed by lariam in view of the outcome of that case. [3350/18]

35. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces prescribing policy in regard to lariam as the first choice anti-malarial will change in view of the recent substantial settlements in cases here and in the United Kingdom for army lariam damage. [3349/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16 and 35 together.

As I have indicated to this House in the past, fundamentally the choice of malaria chemoprophylaxis for use in the Defence Forces is a medical matter that should be decided by qualified medical professionals. In the Defence Forces these are decisions for highly qualified Medical Officers, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces.

As the Deputy is aware, a Working Group was re-convened to review developments arising in relation to malaria chemoprophylaxis and the use of Lariam, particularly in the context of the current and potential litigation. The Working Group has produced its Second Report which has been provided to me. As previously advised, the Working Group was convened in the context of current and potential litigation and is therefore legally privileged. It has made a total of twelve recommendations, which are intended to ensure that the Defence Forces medical policies and practices continually develop in light of best practice. I have accepted these recommendations in principle whilst recognising that certain of these recommendations will need to be further developed to allow for their implementation.

Whilst acknowledging that the Report is legally privileged in the context of litigation, I can confirm that many of its recommendations focus on areas including planning, training and education/information sharing as well as the establishment of a Medical Advisory Group. As I already indicated, proposals will be developed further in relation to the establishment of this new Medical Advisory Group. This will formalise the provision of on-going expert advice, including external expert medical advice, to the Defence Forces in relation to a range of medical matters including malaria chemoprophylaxis.

There are three anti-malarial drugs, namely Lariam (mefloquine), Malarone and Doxycycline which continue to be used by the Defence Forces. The selection by a Medical Officer of the most appropriate drug for use is a complex one and dependant on a number of factors. All of these anti-malaria drugs have contraindications and side effects. Significant precautions are taken by the Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of members of the Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications. It is the policy of the Defence Forces that personnel are individually screened for fitness for service overseas and medical suitability.

The Deputy will also be aware that the State Claims Agency manages Personal Injury claims on behalf of the Department of Defence. The Lariam case referred to by the Deputy was settled

on 30th November 2017 without admission of liability. The Plaintiff withdrew any part of his claim in relation to the choice by the Defendants of Lariam as a chemoprophylactic. All other matters are settled and the case was struck out. You will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any individual cases, either ongoing or finalised. There are no plans to introduce a compensation scheme in relation to this matter.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a key priority for me and the Defence Forces.

Gender Equality

17. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps he plans to take to increase gender equality in the Defence Forces. [3178/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of the 31st of December, 2017 the strength of the Permanent Defence Force stood at 9,173 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) personnel. Of this some 6.6%, or 600 personnel, were female.

The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. This is underlined by a commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the level of female participation in the Defence Forces.

One impediment in achieving greater numbers of women serving in the Defence Forces is the lack of women recruitment applicants relative to men which may be as a result of societal perception and attitudes to female soldiers and officers.

A number of specific initiatives have been implemented to increase the level of female participation such as the targeting of female websites as part of recruitment campaigns and visits to female schools by Defence Forces personnel to promote a career in the Defence Forces to women. Other initiatives include:

- The introduction of best practices in recruitment, such as the adjustment of physical standards for female applicants,
- Special consideration is paid to women as a target group for recruitment,
- A balanced composition between men and women on recruitment and selection boards,
- All promotions and career courses are open to both sexes on merit,
- A Gender Advisor has been appointed to promote gender equality policies and training within the Defence Forces.

The White Paper on Defence recognised a requirement to develop a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and this, along with the associated Action Plan, has been achieved.

Notwithstanding the recent proactive initiatives, over the lifetime of the White Paper further projects will be progressed to ensure that the development and promotion of strategies that support increased female participation in the Defence Forces is continued. Such projects include:

- Developing further initiatives to encourage more women to apply for the Defence Forces and to increase female participation at all ranks.
- Conducting a survey to identify any impediments to the advancement of women in the

PDF.

With the support of the Chief of Staff, I remain committed to maximising recruitment of both men and women to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government, both at home and abroad.

Defence Forces Operations

18. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for the reinstatement of troops in the Border counties in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3451/18]

26. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for the Defence Forces in counties Cavan, Monaghan and the greater Border region in view of Brexit and the possible reintroduction of a hard border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3452/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18 and 26 together.

As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department is engaged in forward planning with the other Departments involved in addressing all issues relevant to the UK decision to leave the EU.

The progress made towards the end of last year, as part of the first phase of the Brexit negotiations, offers encouragement in relation to border issues where a significant commitment was made to avoid a hard border.

The UK decision to exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border control requirements at this time. Furthermore, primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Minister for Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners, again when requested to do so.

I wish to assure the Deputy that there is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place. My Department will continue to monitor the ongoing situation to ensure that both it and the Defence Forces are fully prepared to address any potential issues that might arise in the defence area as a consequence of Brexit.

Permanent Structured Co-operation

19. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which he expects the Defence Forces to be in a position to avail of extra training and upgrading of facilities to best international level through PESCO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3375/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): PESCO is a mechanism provided for in the Treaty of the European Union to enable participating member States to come together and, on a project by project basis, jointly develop military crisis management capabilities for use in support of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions in support of international peace and security.

Now that we are participating in PESCO, the focus for Ireland will be on identifying key PESCO projects which can enhance the capability and capacity of the Defence Forces to successfully undertake modern complex UN mandated missions, including CSDP operations and on supporting interoperability in this regard. Consideration is currently being given to the potential PESCO projects in which Ireland will participate. The work on elaborating the details of these project proposals and potential participants is currently ongoing at EU level and Ireland is playing a full part in those deliberations. Once these deliberations have been completed the next step will be for a Council Decision to approve the first tranche of PESCO projects to be developed. At this juncture it is anticipated that the Council will be in a position to take that decision in March 2018.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it may take some time from the initiation of individual projects through to their completion for the capabilities or benefits to become available to Member States, including Ireland.

Overseas Missions

20. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on whether the Irish peacekeeping contingent serving with UNDOF should be withdrawn (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3366/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was established on 31 May 1974 by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 350 (1974), following the agreed disengagement of the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights in May 1974.

UNDOF was established to:

- Maintain the ceasefire between Israel and Syria
- Supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces; and
- Supervise the areas of separation and limitation, as

provided in the May 1974 Agreement on Disengagement.

Since 1974, the mandate of UNDOF has been renewed every six months, most recently in December 2017, until 30 June 2018.

A contingent of the Permanent Defence Force has been deployed to UNDOF on the Golan Heights since 2013. The contingent operates in the role of a Quick Reaction Force. The current contingent the 56th Infantry Group, deployed to UNDOF in early October 2017 and the next contingent is due to deploy in April 2018. Some 136 Irish troops are currently serving as part of the UNDOF mission.

On 14 November 2016, UNDOF completed the initial phase of the incremental return of the mission to Camp Faouar on the Syrian side of the Area of Separation where Fijian and Nepalese troops are now based. The full return to the area of separation during 2018 is being considered

in the light of the security assessments and other required assurances.

Pending the full return of UNDOF to the area of separation, UNDOF has continued to maintain credible presence in the Golan in line with its mandate. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and both support the continued presence of UNDOF in the area of separation. The UNDOF mission remains an important element in ensuring the continuing ceasefire between Israel and Syria and in the wider Middle East Region.

As with all missions, developments in the UNDOF area of operation are kept under ongoing review. However, given the views of the parties and the UN in relation to the importance of this observer mission in supporting stability and the continuing ceasefire between the parties and the disengagement agreement, the continued presence of UNDOF, and Ireland's support to it, remains an important element in the response of the international community through the UN. We will continue to support the mission in this regard.

Question No. 21 answered with Question No. 9.

Defence Forces

22. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the action being taken in the Defence Forces to address the findings in the recent climate survey in relation to stress being experienced by personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3131/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces Climate Survey was commissioned on foot of a recommendation contained in the third and most recent Report of the Independent Monitoring Group (IMG) which was established to oversee the implementation of recommendations relating to harassment, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment within the Defence Forces.

Follow up work to the initial findings in the Survey was conducted by the University of Limerick researchers via focus groups. A total of 73 Focus Groups were conducted throughout the Defence Forces. There were 603 participants in total. The focus group report further explored the issues raised in the original survey. The comments quoted therein cover a wide range of issues relating to human resources management. These include pay and conditions (particularly pay for the lowest paid members of the Defence Forces), vacancies, recruitment and retention, promotion systems, performance management, leadership, culture, morale, stress and work-life balance. I was briefed on the Report at the end of June and I met with the Representative Associations on the 13th July 2017, ahead of its official publication a week later. It is important to note that the focus groups were conducted in advance of the pay increases that were implemented in 2017. These increases particularly targeted the lowest paid across the public service. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 also provides a mechanism for further pay increases and this Agreement has been accepted by both PDFORRA and RACO. This is a further step along the path of restoration of pay scales.

While work to progress many of the other issues raised was already underway as part of the implementation of the White Paper on Defence, I have directed that certain White Paper projects be brought forward and that work commence on these.

In addition, there is on-going recruitment to the Defence Forces and a range of initiatives are being developed including commissioning from the ranks, criteria for the re-entry of former Permanent Defence Force personnel with specific skills and consideration of increased use of direct entry for specialist posts. The Public Service Pay Commission will also examine recruit-

ment and retention issues in its next tranche of work.

There are extensive support systems in place for members of the Defence Forces who may be experiencing stress. Members of the Defence Forces can avail of Personnel Support Services (PSS) which provides information, assistance and counselling on a range of matters including interpersonal problems. These supports will be kept under review.

Questions Nos. 23 and 24 answered with Question No. 9.

Defence Forces Remuneration

25. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the proportion of the €21 million in additional current funding for his Department in 2018 that will go towards improving the pay and conditions of serving members of the Defence Forces. [3346/18]

33. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the impact that recent changes in public sector pay rates and conditions will have on members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53458/17]

40. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding pay for personnel within the Defence Forces with particular reference to the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3155/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 25, 33 and 40 together.

Rates of pay and conditions of employment in the Irish public sector have traditionally been set, inter alia, by reference to relative levels of pay across the various sectors of the Irish public sector. Like other areas within the Public Service, the pay of the Permanent Defence Force was reduced during the financial crisis. The reductions in pay and the introduction of a Pension Related Deduction was on a graduated basis with increased rates of deductions for those on higher earnings.

The Government appreciate the contribution made by all public servants, including members of the Permanent Defence Force, during the economic crisis and have taken measures to improve public sector pay. The focus of the increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay.

PDFORRA signed up to the Lansdowne Road Agreement in March 2017. The finalisation of negotiations under the agreement allowed for the commencement of the process for the implementation of pay increases and arrears, which have now been applied to the Permanent Defence Force. An increase of 2.5% from 1 January 2016, for annualised salaries up to €24,000 and 1% for annualised salaries between €24,001 and €31,000 was included in the weekly payroll of 5 July 2017. An increase of €1,000 from 1 April 2017, on annualised salaries up to €65,000 per annum was paid on 19 July 2017.

In addition to this, as a result of successful negotiations with PDFORRA, the pay of general service recruits and privates who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, was increased further. These improved payscales, were backdated to 1 July 2016 and the payments were made with backmoney due in August 2017. The starting pay for a newly qualified three star private, and their Naval Service equivalent, saw an increase from €21,800 to €27,000 (inclusive of military service allowance) gross annual earnings, with scope for further income from duties.

Going forward, there are further increases arising from the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. This provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement, with the focus once again on the lower paid.

The Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, who participated in the negotiation process, accepted the terms of the agreement in December 2017. As a result of this all Permanent Defence Force personnel will benefit from the planned pay increases. Arrangements are being made to process the first increase due under the agreement, of 1% of annualised salary effective from 1 January 2018.

In respect of additional current funding of €21 million for the Department of Defence in 2018, some €12 million has been allocated to the Defence Vote to meet the adjustments in the pay and allowances for serving members of the Defence Forces arising under Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. The balance of the additional funding is to go towards the Pension Vote, taking account of the increasing number of Defence Forces pensioners and adjustments to pensions for current pensioners due under the agreement.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 18.

Defence Forces Strength

27. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the measures he plans to take to ensure personnel are recruited and retained in all grades of the Defence Forces in view of the prevalence of low pay, poor conditions and the numbers qualifying for FIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3369/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service.

There has always been a relatively large turnover of personnel in the Defence Forces and there is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level. During 2017, 751 new personnel were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force. As of end December 2017, the strength of the PDF was 9,173 personnel and it is intended that recruitment will continue during 2018. At this point I anticipate that approximately 800 personnel will be inducted in 2018.

Family Income Supplement provides a means to supplement a family's income, be they employed in the public or private sector. Eligibility is assessed having regard to combined family income and the number of dependent children. Pay levels in the Public Service, including the Defence Forces, are determined on an individual basis and are not weighted in accordance with family circumstances.

There have been significant improvements in pay for members of the Defence Forces under the Lansdowne Road Agreement, which PDFORRA signed up to in March 2017. The finalisation of negotiations under the agreement allowed for the commencement of the process for the implementation of pay increases and arrears, which have now been applied to the Permanent Defence Force.

Following these revisions of pay, the first point on the payscale for a Corporal, including Military Service Allowance, is around €37,000. The first point on the payscale for a Sergeant, including Military Service Allowance, is just under €40,000 per annum. A newly qualified non-

graduate entry 2nd Lieutenant can expect a minimum of €35,000 per annum after 15 months of training, while a graduate entry Lieutenant can expect a minimum of €39,860 per annum after 15 months of training.

In addition, improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were agreed in separate negotiations with PDFORRA. The revised pay scales were backdated to 1 July 2016 and paid in August 2017. Gross annual earnings for this cohort is €27,000 (inclusive of military service allowance). This is a significant increase in pay which was approximately €21,800 per annum prior to this agreement.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for further increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement. The agreement was accepted by the members of the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations in December 2017. Arrangements are being made to process the first 1% increase in annualised salaries due from 1 January 2018, for all Permanent Defence Force personnel. This builds upon the previous pay increases and further increases will take place over the lifetime of the agreement.

I have previously outlined particular challenges with vacancies in certain specialist posts such as Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers and certain Technicians. These specialists can prove difficult to retain where, as in the current economic circumstances, there are ongoing private sector and commercial semi-state sector job opportunities. In accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Public Service Pay Commission will further examine the issue of recruitment and the retention of specialist personnel and I understand that both PDFORRA and RACO have been invited to make submissions. The Department of Defence is also preparing a submission.

I remain committed to ensuring that the Defence Forces retain the capacity to fulfil all roles assigned, both at home and overseas.

Defence Forces Remuneration

28. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when a tech three payment which has been outstanding for ten years can be made to an active member of the Defence Forces; the effect possible retirement in 2018 after 21 years of service will have on payment after this date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3135/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Conciliation and Arbitration (C and A) for members of the Permanent Defence Force provides a formal mechanism for both RACO (who represent commissioned officers) and PDFORRA (who represent enlisted personnel) to engage with the Official side on matters, which come within the scope of the Scheme.

Having regard to commitments made under national public sector pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative bodies. Where agreement is not reached it is open to both official and representative sides to refer the matter to an adjudicator or an arbitration Board to settle the matter.

On 27th September 2010, the Adjudicator awarded an increase in technician pay to cooks in the Permanent Defence Force. This award is backdated to 1 June 2006.

There are a number of outstanding Adjudication findings, across the Public Service, which cannot be implemented at this time having regard to the provisions of the Financial Emergency

Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009 to 2015.

This adjudication is part of the outstanding adjudication findings covered under previous agreements and paragraph 5.2.1 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. This states that the parties commit to entering a process to conclude by end-September 2018 which will involve engagement in relation to an appropriate, time-bound process for addressing any outstanding adjudications.

The review mechanism is the subject of ongoing consideration by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The question of payments to personnel who have retired in the interim will be considered as part of the process.

International Terrorism

29. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of additional initiatives the Defence Forces are taking in the wake of various international terror attacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3456/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence, published in the Autumn of 2015, considered the security environment, including the threat from international terrorism. It notes that the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for protecting the internal security of the State. The Defence Forces provide, on request, supports in aid to the civil power (ATCP) of an ongoing and contingent nature.

In this context, the security environment is kept under constant review. An Garda Síochána can request a broad range of supports from the Defence Forces including Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams and the Army Ranger Wing. On-going coordination and liaison meetings take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána and, based on on-going threat assessments, the Gardaí and the Defence Forces liaise with regard to possible Defence Forces supports required for a range of contingencies. In this context, I can confirm that there is very active cooperation between an Garda Síochána and Defence Forces including exercises. For example, in December 2017, the Defence Forces, in cooperation with An Garda Síochána, conducted a large scale exercise in the Dublin area based on a terrorism-related scenario.

Defence Forces contingency plans and operational orders are continuously reviewed, amended and reissued as required. Military skills, which are integral elements of the Defence Forces training, are regularly exercised and tested in responding to terrorist threats.

The White Paper on Defence set the defence capability agenda for the next decade. In recognising the dynamic nature of the security environment, the Government decided that the Defence Forces would continue to retain a range of flexible conventional military capabilities, in order to meet the roles assigned and as a hedge to future uncertainty.

There are a broad range of White Paper projects currently being implemented which are intended to identify, and develop and maintain such capabilities. It remains a top priority for me and my Department to implement the White Paper projects and ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 6.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 9.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 6.

Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 25.

Air Corps

34. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to follow the approach of other states in addressing concerns raised by Air Corps personnel in relation to the issue of toxic exposure. [3179/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will be aware, following an inspection in 2016, the Air Corps has continued to work with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) to improve its health and safety regime. The military authorities have informed me that the HSA has formally noted the considerable progress made to date by the Defence Forces towards implementation of a safety management system for the control of hazardous substances. Subject to completion of the improvement plan, the HSA investigation is closed. However, it must be noted that in the Air Corps health and safety is a matter of ongoing monitoring, supervision and adjustment.

The Deputy has previously raised the matter of the Australian approach with me which I have addressed in my response to PQ No. 849 of 7th March 2017. As I indicated at the time, I am informed by the military authorities that there are a number of published reports and on-going studies in relation to Australian personnel who were exposed to chemicals while conducting a particular maintenance task on a specific aircraft programme. As such, the military authorities have advised that it would be difficult to draw a direct comparison between the Irish Air Corps and that of the Australian Air Force.

The Deputy will also be aware that the State Claims Agency is currently managing 7 claims taken against the Minister for Defence, for personal injuries alleging exposure to chemical and toxic substance whilst working in the Air Corps in the period 1991 to 2006. As litigation is ongoing it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 16.

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

36. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the numbers serving in the Defence Forces Reserve at the end of 2017; the projected enlistment for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3358/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government appreciates the service of the members of the Reserve Defence Force. The White Paper on Defence is clear that there is a continued requirement to retain and develop the Reserve and it confirms that the primary role of the Reserve is to augment the Permanent Defence Force in times of crisis. In non-crisis situations, the main focus will be on training to prepare for this role. The Government has also assigned a formal role to the Reserve of contributing to State ceremonial events.

As of the 31st December 2017 the number of personnel in the Reserve Defence Force was as follows:

First Line Reserve: 271 personnel

Army Reserve: 1,732 (effective) personnel

Naval Service Reserve: 124 (effective) personnel

I am aware that there is a shortfall between current strength and the establishment, which provides for 4,069 personnel for the combined Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve. The most recent recruitment campaign for the Army Reserve and Naval Service began in July 2017 and attracted 1,221 applications. A total of 139 personnel were inducted to the Reserve Defence Force in 2017.

It is my intention to hold a further Reserve recruitment campaign in 2018 and I have directed the military authorities to maximise recruitment to the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve, having regard to training demands arising from the significant ongoing recruitment to the PDF.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 9.

Defence Forces Expenditure

38. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the 52% increase in capital expenditure envisaged by his Department between 2017 and 2020 and the 2.5% increase in current expenditure envisaged over the same period in view of the recruitment and retention crisis being faced by the Defence Forces as a consequence of pay and conditions in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3347/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following the mid-term review of the capital plan, 'Building on Recovery : Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016 – 2021', Budget 2018 set out the capital envelope for Vote 36 Defence, for the period 2018 – 2021. This provides increased funding for the essential renewal and replacement of equipment and infrastructure. This is critical in ensuring that the Defence Forces retain the capability to deliver on the roles assigned by Government, over the longer term.

Defence current expenditure funding provides for standing and operational costs and pay and allowances for members of the Defence Forces. The Defence Vote is fully funded to meet the full costs of the target strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel. Rates of pay and allowances for the Defence Forces are set, inter alia, by reference to relative levels of pay across the public sector. As provided for under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Public Service Pay Commission is currently considering recruitment and retention issues in the Defence Forces.

Advertising Regulation

39. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the recent attempts by the British army to recruit young Irish persons through social media, contrary to the Defence Acts; and the steps he plans to take in relation to this. [3177/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I refer to my answer to Question Number 230 of 15th November 2017. As I indicated in that response, in today's media-rich and connected world, Irish citizens are regularly exposed to content through a variety of mediums and social media channels would be no exception. Such content can include recruitment campaigns for foreign military organisations.

However, as Minister with responsibility for Defence, I am more than satisfied that the Defence Forces is the employer of choice for Irish citizens who wish to pursue a military career in an organisation with a deservedly world-class reputation. The PDF provides such individuals with training, career progression and ongoing development in a diverse range of roles. Interest in such career opportunities is demonstrated by the large number of applications received for the two General Service Recruitment Campaigns last year.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 25.

Army Barracks

41. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the barracks in use in Dublin; the deployment of forces between those barracks; and if there are plans for an amalgamation or co-ordination of the resources in this regard. [3450/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are four permanently occupied military installations in Dublin. These are located at Cathal Brugha Barracks (Rathmines), McKee Barracks (Blackhorse Avenue), St. Bricin's Hospital (Infirmary Road) and Casement Aerodrome (Baldonnel).

For operational and security reasons, details of troop numbers at each location cannot be disclosed. It should be noted however that the number of personnel stationed at a particular location will frequently vary as it is a normal operational feature for there to be a constant through-flow of personnel into and out of military installations on an ongoing basis.

The Defence property portfolio is kept under review to ensure the most effective use of resources having regard to the roles assigned by Government to the Defence Forces. However, there are currently no plans to close or amalgamate any permanently occupied military installations.

Questions Nos. 42 and 43 answered with Question No. 10.

Defence Forces

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he remains satisfied that membership of the Defence Forces remains an attractive career in respect of men and women; if particular issues have arisen in this regard such as pay or conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3376/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, there is understandably a relatively high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. However, this is not new and the Defence Forces have always had a level of turnover that far exceeds other areas of the public service.

I remain committed to ensuring ongoing recruitment to the Defence Forces and that, where possible, the terms and conditions of service are as favourable as they can be within the current budgetary parameters.

In order to balance personnel turnover there is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers.

A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered. The conduct of two recruitment campaigns in 2017 for general service recruits yielded just over 8,000 applicants.

In terms of pay, following PDFORRA'S acceptance of the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement last year, adjustments have been applied to salary scales with the focus on the lower paid. On completion of recruit and three star training newly qualified 3 star Privates and their Naval Service equivalent can expect minimum gross annual earnings of €27,000 (inclusive of military service allowance) an increase of over €5,000 on the previous total of €21,828.

The terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 have been accepted by PD-FORRA and RACO. This Agreement also provides for further pay increases ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement.

I have announced a number of initiatives ranging from a review of the C&A Scheme, a review of the criteria governing Contracts for enlisted personnel and a comprehensive skills gap analysis across the Defence Forces. These directly address issues raised in the Climate Study. In addition, the Chief of Staff is actively addressing matters relating to military management of work practices in the Defence Forces.

I am satisfied that membership of the Defence Forces is an attractive career prospect for men and women who wish to serve their country in a military context.

Curragh Plains Representative Forum

45. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide an update on the most recent meeting of the Curragh Forum; the areas addressed and actions taken arising from the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3253/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Curragh Forum was established to provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to consider and progress a wide range of issues regarding the use and management of the Curragh Plains.

The most recent meeting of the Forum took place on Friday 12 January 2018. It was attended by representatives of the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces, An Garda Síochána, Kildare County Council, Curragh Racecourse Ltd, the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association and Horse Racing Ireland. The issues discussed included legislation, traffic, signage and parking issues, illegal encampments, sheep grazing rights, and the ongoing land management and maintenance of the Curragh Plains. It was agreed that progress in all of these areas requires Forum members to take ownership and work collaboratively in identifying and working towards implementing solutions.

A number of key actions were agreed by the members of the Forum to assist in addressing some of these issues. A work-programme was established for 2018 that will build on the progress made in the areas under discussion and will be supplemented by new issues arising. In addition, Kildare Co. Council has agreed that in conjunction with Kildare Fáilte, it will produce a Vision document for the Curragh that will be presented to the Forum for discussion.

On the work-programme, work has been undertaken in identifying suitable locations for the construction of car parking spaces on the Curragh, thus reducing damage to grasslands. The design and associated costings will be progressed in 2018. A new lands management team

will be put in place in 2018 to oversee all activities on the ground including, but not limited to, litter, sheep branding, patrolling, monitoring users of lands, inspection of property boundaries, engagement with the public, and a proposed new role of engaging in education and outreach. A new environmental maintenance contract will also be sent to tender shortly.

A review of the legislation governing the Curragh has highlighted that changes to it will be complex and protracted. It was agreed to advance this in parallel with the use of other legislation that can more immediately address relevant issues.

It was also agreed that more regular meetings of the Forum should take place in order to progress these matters.

Air Corps

46. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the action which will be taken on the Air Corps chemical exposure scandal in view of the receipt of the whistleblower's views on the O'Toole Report. [3606/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a priority for me. In September 2016, I appointed an independent third party to review allegations made in a number of protected disclosures relating to health and safety issues in the Air Corps which were received in late 2015 and early 2016.

The report of the independent third party was received by the Department in June 2017. Although the report found that the regime in the Defence Forces appears to be capable of meeting statutory requirements, the report makes a number of observations; including in relation to documentation, health surveillance, and exposure monitoring. It also notes that the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is the appropriate statutory body to deal with such matters. I sent the report to those who had made disclosures for their views and I am considering the next steps in the process having received those views and in the context of ongoing litigation.

Separately and in parallel to the independent review, following an inspection in 2016, the Air Corps has continued to work with the HSA to improve its health and safety regime. The military authorities have informed me that the HSA has formally noted the considerable progress made to-date by the Defence Forces towards implementation of a safety management system for the control of hazardous substances. Subject to completion of the improvement plan, the HSA investigation is closed. However, it must be noted that in the Air Corps health and safety is a matter of ongoing monitoring, supervision and adjustment.

Gender Equality

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the criteria regarding admission to the ranks of the Defence Forces for transgender persons; if that criteria differs from other applicants; and if there are legal impediments to prevent transgender persons pursuing a career in the Defence Forces. [3634/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government believes that the Defence Forces should reflect the modern demographics of Irish society. To that end, the Defence Forces operate in an environment without discrimination in areas covered by the Equality Acts as they apply to the Defence Forces. In addition the Defence Forces com-

ply with the legal provisions of the Gender Recognition Act 2015. They also ensure that the principles of equality are adhered to in all aspects of recruitment, induction, employment and daily routine, training, education and promotion

In keeping with this ethos, the Defence Forces are committed to the principle of equal opportunities in all of its employment policies and welcome applications from all members of Irish society, irrespective of religion, sexual orientation or gender.

Each recruit must undergo the same application process which consists of:

- Psychometric test,
- Fitness test and interview
- Medical test and security check.

Any legal impediments to joining the Defence Forces that do exist (such as age, disability and residency requirements) apply equally to all applicants.

Defence Forces Recruitment

48. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of qualified physical training instructors the Defence Forces has to oversee annual fitness tests, recruit induction fitness tests and general physical training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3655/18]

50. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the length of time it takes between a potential member submitting the online application to join the Defence Forces and when they formally begin training; the steps being taken to speed up the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3657/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 50 together.

Application for General Service Recruitment to the Defence Forces is conducted on-line and all correspondence with applicants is conducted via e-mail. Candidates must successfully complete fitness testing, online psychometric testing and interview in order to progress through the competition. Following these stages of the recruitment process, successful applicants may be placed on panels and may be offered a position, subject to successfully completing a medical examination and obtaining security clearance.

The interview and fitness test take place on the same day and applicants are afforded some flexibility with regard to the date for this as is the case regarding the medical test.

The length of time from initial application to readiness for attestation is approximately four months. However, applications may take longer, depending on the specific circumstances of the application and the timing of recruit intakes.

I am informed by the military authorities that there are currently one hundred and eighty eight (188) qualified military personnel in service who can oversee recruit induction fitness tests, annual fitness tests and general physical training. These personnel undertake a fifteen (15) week course of training which qualifies them for the role of Physical Training Instructors.

White Paper on Defence

49. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the timeframe for the full implementation of the White Paper on Defence; when it will be fully completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3656/18]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The 2015 White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda over a ten year planning horizon and encompasses all work carried out by the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and Civil Defence. It comprehends the Government's policy on defence of the State from armed aggression, the defence contribution to domestic security, the defence contribution to international peace and security and a broad range of other "non-security" roles which the Government require the Defence Forces and Civil Defence to undertake. It considers the defence capabilities required so that the Defence Forces can successfully deliver on the roles assigned by Government. Finally, the White Paper also considers implementation and the actions required to ensure that defence planning and provision processes are further developed.

During scoping of the White Paper implementation programme 88 actions or projects were specifically identified. These actions represent a subset of the totality of the work being carried out as part of the implementation programme for the White Paper. While it is currently intended to have all 88 projects initiated or completed by the end of the ten year implementation programme, work in certain areas will continue beyond 2025 in order to ensure that changes, improvements and actions envisaged in the White Paper are fully implemented and to assure that positive outcomes endure and are embedded in the day to day business of the Defence Organisation.

Implementation of the specific actions identified in the White Paper is being carried out on a phased basis over a ten year period out to 2025. Implementation on a phased basis is necessary in order to reflect Programme for Partnership Government and Strategy Statement commitments, the related nature of some projects and resourcing implications. This process is being kept under review and will be subject to change as issues arise and other business dictates.

Progress on implementation will be reported on as part of the Annual Report and be comprehended within the development of the planned fixed cycle of defence reviews.

Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 48.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

51. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces that are in receipt of FIS and HAP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3658/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The circumstances surrounding an application for Family Income Supplement or Housing Assistance Payment, is a private matter between the applicant and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection or Local Authority, as appropriate. Various factors can give rise to such claims, with household income and the number of dependents being key variables.

It should be noted that despite the difficult economic environment we have witnessed over the last few years, these types of payments have acted as an important safety net for families who by virtue of their particular circumstances require financial support.

The Government recognises the contribution made by all public servants, including members of the Permanent Defence Force, during the economic crisis. Under Public Service Pay Agreements, pay is being restored to public servants. Successful negotiations with the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations have provided for pay increases under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. These pay increases were weighted in favour of the lower paid.

Improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were backdated to 1 July 2016 and paid in August 2017. Gross annual earnings for this cohort is €27,000 (inclusive of military service allowance). This is a significant increase in pay which was approximately €21,800 per annum previously.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 contains proposals for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement. I welcome the fact that the Defence Forces Representative Associations have accepted this agreement.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

52. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the employment protections in place for RDF members to allow them to attend training and courses which overlap with their employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3659/18]

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the appropriate leave of training remains available to the Defence Forces Reserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3683/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 63 together.

The primary function of training and education in both the Permanent Defence Force and the Reserve Defence Force is to develop and maintain capabilities necessary to enable personnel to fulfil the roles laid down by Government. The scheduling of training in the Defence Forces, including the Reserve, is underpinned by an analysis of training needed to meet operational output requirements and capability development needs. A long term strategy is adopted with current planning horizons out to 2021. In addition the White Paper on Defence sets out a developmental path for the Reserve and confirms that the primary role of the Reserve is to augment the PDF in crisis situations.

For the current year, Subhead A.5 provides for a budget of €2.15 million of which €2.068 million is allocated for Paid Training Mandays for members of the Reserve. This allocation will provide seven days annual paid training for all effective members of the Reserve, fourteen days paid training for all additional personnel recruited to the Reserve in 2018 and provide for career and specialist courses for selected members of the Reserve in line with Reserve priorities. This provision is sufficient having regard to the existing strength of the RDF and the voluntary nature of Reserve training.

The type of training undertaken varies between the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve.

In the Army Reserve, recruits undergo varied training in areas such as combat first aid, military law and tactical training. A major part of Recruit training is training in the use of the Steyr 5.56mm Assault Rifle. After recruit training is complete, personnel are then trained in the operation of basic radio communications, map reading, Nuclear, Biological & Chemical warfare defence and the Light Machine Gun. Each Corps also carries out specialist training in its particular

field. For example, the Infantry and Cavalry Corps train in weapons and tactics and the Corps of Engineers train in engineering tasks, such as demolition, construction and mine warfare.

In the Naval Service Reserve, the two main courses undertaken as a recruit are Sea Survival and Damage Control & Fire Fighting. Naval Service Reserve personnel also undergo training in the operation of various crafts operated by the Naval Service, such as Motor Training Launches and Rigid Inflatable Boats. As in the Army Reserve, Naval Service Reserve personnel are trained in the use of the Steyr 5.56mm Assault Rifle. Naval Service Reserve personnel also receive full training in VHF Radios, including voice procedure at sea and operation of the VHF systems. Courses are also run for personnel on the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System.

Members of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve are volunteers who undertake training in their spare time. In order to facilitate the voluntary nature of Reserve Service and to maximise attendance of Reserve personnel, training continues to be organised both in and out of normal working hours, at weekends and during academic and traditional holiday periods. There are no plans to introduce legislation to compel employers to allow members of the Reserve to attend training.

I am satisfied that the extensive and professional training provided to the Reserve is a major motivating factor in encouraging people to join it as well as encouraging retention of existing members.

Defence Forces Strength

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which he remains satisfied at the strength of all branches of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3673/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

To achieve this, there is significant on-going recruitment. In 2017 some 751 new personnel were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force, comprising of General Service Recruits, Cadets and specialists for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. As of the 31st of December 2017, the strength of the Permanent Defence Force was 9,173 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) personnel, broken down as follows:

- Army: 7,386 personnel
- Air Corps: 724 personnel
- Naval Service: 1,063 personnel

In 2018, similar recruitment will take place and plans for this are currently being finalised between civil and military management. At this point it is not possible to predict precise numbers that will be recruited but it is anticipated that this will be in the region of 800 personnel.

Certain specialist posts such as Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers and certain Technicians are presenting challenges for recruitment and retention. I have previously acknowledged this fact which is reflective of the current economic circumstances and attractive job opportunities in the private and commercial semi-state sectors. The extensive professional training that such specialists receive within the Defence Forces makes such personnel very attractive within these

sectors. This is not a unique challenge for the Defence Forces and is also faced by military forces elsewhere.

The Public Service Pay Commission is further examining the issue of the recruitment and retention of specialist personnel within the Defence Forces, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 – 2020. The Department of Defence is currently preparing a submission on this issue.

I am addressing the issue of specialist vacancies throughout the Permanent Defence Force with a range of recruitment methods including direct entry competitions for specialist positions. The scope to further expand direct entry is being considered. I have also directed civil and military management to develop proposals to facilitate former PDF personnel with appropriate skill-sets to re-enter the Defence Forces.

Following acceptance by the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, the pay increases available under the Lansdowne Road agreement were applied to the Defence Forces. I was delighted that both PDFORRA and RACO have also signed up to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which is an extension of the Lansdowne Road agreement. This provides for further pay increase of between 6.2% and 7.4% over its lifetime.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment of capable personnel, developing serving personnel, and so achieving the best personnel and skills combination to ensure the Defence Forces retain the capacity to operate effectively across all roles.

Defence Forces

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if research has been undertaken to determine whether the Defence Forces as a career remains an attractive option; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3674/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, there is understandably a relatively high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. However, this is not new and the Defence Forces have always had a level of turnover that far exceeds other areas of the public service.

I remain committed to ensuring ongoing recruitment to the Defence Forces and that, where possible, the terms and conditions of service are as favourable as they can be within the current budgetary parameters.

In order to balance personnel turnover there is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers.

A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered. The conduct of two recruitment campaigns in 2017 for general service recruits yielded just over 8,000 applicants.

In terms of pay, following PDFORRA'S acceptance of the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement last year, adjustments have been applied to salary scales with the focus on the lower paid. On completion of recruit and three star training newly qualified 3 star Privates and their Naval Service equivalent can expect minimum gross annual earnings of €27,000 (inclusive of military service allowance) an increase of over €5,000 on the previous total of €21,828.

The terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 have been accepted by PDFORRA and RACO. This Agreement also provides for further pay increases ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the agreement.

I have announced a number of initiatives ranging from a review of the C&A Scheme, a review of the criteria governing Contracts for enlisted personnel and a comprehensive skills gap analysis across the Defence Forces. These directly address issues raised in the Climate Study. In addition, the Chief of Staff is actively addressing matters relating to military management of work practices in the Defence Forces.

I am satisfied that membership of the Defence Forces is an attractive career prospect for men and women who wish to serve their country in a military context.

Defence Forces Equipment

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he remains satisfied that the territory equipment available to all branches of the Defence Forces remains up-to-date and comparable to the best available internationally in view of the importance of this in the context of PESCO and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3675/18]

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the pressing improvements in respect of military hardware needing upgrading throughout the Defence Forces that have been brought to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3677/18]

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if is satisfied regarding the extent to which rescue aircraft fixed wing helicopters continue to be upgraded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3680/18]

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which seagoing vessels continue to be upgraded in line with international standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3681/18]

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which a replacement programme exists in respect of all equipment including aircraft in the Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3682/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 55, 57 and 60 to 62, inclusive, together.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

Ireland's participation in PESCO will not result in a requirement for additional investment or expenditure on Defence. It provides a means of enhancing interoperability with project partners and ensuring that our troops are equipped with the latest and best equipment and training.

The acquisition of new equipment and equipment upgrades for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me, and the White Paper on Defence recognises that there are several new and or enhanced platforms to be procured. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning priorities planning process.

Budget 2018 includes an increased provision of €25 million for Defence for 2018, and an additional €98 million for capital expenditure out to 2021. This allocation will facilitate the investment necessary to ensure that the Defence Forces have the equipment and infrastructure to deliver on all their roles as set out in the White Paper.

The White Paper provides that the Army will continue to retain all-arms conventional military capabilities, and the principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas.

There is focus on the essential force protection provided by armoured vehicles, and in this regard a maintenance and upgrade programme has commenced for the current fleet of 80 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) which will seek to ensure viability of the fleet out to 2030. 24 armoured utility vehicles have recently been procured for force protection, and a small number of armoured logistical vehicles are also being procured.

In relation to the Air Corps, the White Paper sets out that the Cessna fleet will be replaced with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. In December 2017, following an open tender competition advertised on the eTenders website and on the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in accordance with national and EU procurement regulations, a contract was placed with Pilatus Aircraft Ltd at a cost of some €32m for the provision of three PC-12 fixed wing utility aircraft suitably equipped for ISTAR tasks which will replace the Cessna fleet.

The White Paper also provides for the replacement of two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft to enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks. The planning process for the replacement of the CASA aircraft has recently commenced in my Department.

With regard to rescue aircraft, as the Deputy will be aware, since 2004 the Irish Coast Guard has overall responsibility for the provision of Search and Rescue services within the Irish search and rescue region, and while the Air Corps and the Naval Service provide support to the Irish Coast Guard in maritime Search and Rescue operations this is on an “as available” basis in line with a Service Level Agreement which sets out their roles and responsibilities in this regard. The Air Corps does not operate any dedicated search and rescue aircraft.

The White Paper underpins the ongoing replacement of the Naval Service fleet. A significant investment over recent years has been on the procurement of new Off-Shore Patrol Vessels for the Naval Service. The third ship in the programme, LÉ William Butler Yeats, was commissioned in to service in October 2016. A contract for an additional sister ship was placed with Babcock International, a British company, in June 2016 bringing investment in the new ships programme to over €250 million since 2010. The fourth ship, to be named LÉ George Bernard Shaw is scheduled for delivery in mid 2018.

Future Naval Service capabilities are being planned as part of the White Paper project planning process which will determine the Defence Organisation’s maritime capability requirements. The White Paper provides for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel which will be enabled for helicopter operations and will also have a freight carrying capacity. It is the intention to hold a public tender competition in due course to cover the supply of the MRV subject to the availability of funding within the overall Defence capital funding envelope. The cost of the MRV will only be known once the tender competition is concluded.

I am satisfied that the current provisions, together with the courses of action in the White Paper, will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces is suitably equipped, in line with international best practice, to fulfil all roles assigned by Government.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces that have returned in each of the past five years to date; the number of new recruits by way of replacement in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3676/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The table shows the number of personnel who were discharged over the past five years and the number of new personnel inducted for the same period.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Discharges	445 (of which 85 Recruits)	469 (of which 105 Recruits)	556 (of which 62 Recruits)	655 (of which 128 Recruits)	700 (of which 175 Recruits)
Inductions	445	508	405	690	751

Discharges includes personnel who left for a variety of reasons including on age grounds, at end of contract and voluntary discharges. Included in this number is the number of recruits who exited prior to completion of training (shown in brackets). Inductions includes general service recruits, cadets, apprentices and direct entry posts.

I can confirm that similar recruitment to 2017 levels will take place this year and plans for this are currently being finalised between civil and military management. At this point it is not possible to predict precise numbers that will be recruited but it is anticipated that this will be in the region of 800 personnel, comprising of General Service Recruits, Apprentices, Cadets and Direct Entry Officers.

As I have previously outlined there are particular challenges with vacancies in certain specialist posts such as Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers and certain Technicians. These specialists can prove difficult to retain where, as in the current economic circumstances, there are ongoing private sector and commercial semi-state sector job opportunities.

To address these difficulties, a range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions. I have directed the civil and military management to develop proposals for expanding such direct entry recruitment of specialists and a scheme to facilitate former PDF personnel with appropriate skill-sets to re-enter the Defence Forces.

The Public Service Pay Commission will further examine the issue of retention of specialist personnel in accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020

In tandem with these actions my Department is also engaged in planning on a longer term basis. Projects arising from the White Paper on Defence around topics such as medium term manpower planning and encouraging as wide a pool as possible for recruitment are already underway. Further projects, scheduled to begin shortly will address issues such as age profiles and a gap analysis of skill-sets within the PDF. The gap analysis will help to identify the frequency of such gaps and identify appropriate measures to address them.

With the support of the Chief of Staff, I remain committed to maximising recruitment to en-

sure that the Defence Forces are staffed in a manner that will enable them to continue to deliver the services required of them by Government.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 55.

Defence Forces Operations

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the ability of the Defence Forces to meet all emergencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3678/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

In relation to equipment, priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process.

The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capabilities necessary to deliver on the roles assigned by Government. Engagements with national and international educational institutions, military and civilian, aim to ensure that the Defence Forces retain currency with regards to best international practice and employ relevant modern training methods.

At National level, representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency.

In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management, primary responsibility for responding to emergencies such as severe weather events or terrorist attacks rests with the three designated principal response agencies, namely, the relevant Local Authority, An Garda Síochána, and the Health Service Executive. The Defence Forces provide the fullest possible support in the event of a natural disaster or emergency situation in its Aid to the Civil Authority and Aid to the Civil Power roles. Major Emergency Plans have been developed by local and regional authorities and these Plans identify the procedures for requesting assistance from the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces retains a wide range of specialist skills and equipment, which can be deployed in such circumstances. The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any emergencies that may arise.

I am committed to ensuring that the Defence Forces continue to be equipped and trained to best international standards and that this position is kept under on-going review.

Overseas Missions Data

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces serving overseas in various locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3679/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 1 January 2018, Ireland is contributing 589 Permanent Defence Force personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world. The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 379 personnel, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 136 personnel.

Ireland has, in addition, pledged to the United Nations Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System to make certain additional capabilities (troops and equipment) available to the United Nations on request. Also, at the United Nations Defence Ministerial summit held in Vancouver in November 2017, Ireland pledged certain training capabilities for delivery in Ireland and in partner countries overseas. Any additional deployments will be subject to the provision of the Defence Acts and the triple lock as appropriate.

The overall current contribution of some 589 personnel to overseas missions reflects the Government's continued commitment to the United Nations and to our responsibilities in the area of international peace and security.

Details of all personnel currently serving overseas are listed below.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas

As of 1st January 2018

UN MISSIONS

(I) UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQ- 30

UNIFIL 111th Infantry Battalion- 341

UNIFIL Sector West HQ - 8

(ii) UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel and Syria - 12

(iii) MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) - 3

(iv) MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) - 4

(v) UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) HQ (Yafour Damascus) - 1

UNDOF Staff Appointments (Camp Ziouani) - 5

UNDOF 56th Infantry Group (Camp Ziouani) -130

TOTAL - 534

UN MANDATED MISSIONS

(vi) EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) - 5

(vii) EUTM Mali (EU-Led Training Mission) - 20

(viii) KFOR (International Security Presence in Kosovo) HQ - 12

(ix) OHQ/FHQ (Op Sophia HQ) - 3

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS - 574

ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

24 January 2018

(I) Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna - 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE - 1

EU MILITARY STAFF

Brussels - 4

MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF

(I) Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York - 1

(ii) Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna - 1

(iii) Military Representative to EU(Brussels) - 4

(iv) Liaison Officer of Ireland, NATO /PfP (Brussels) - 2

(v) EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium - 1

(vi) Irish Liaison Officer to SHAPE & Military Co-Op Division, Mons, Belgium - 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVER-SEAS - 589

Questions Nos. 60 to 62, inclusive, answered with Question No. 55.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 52.

Gender Balance

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which women continue to be attracted to all branches of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3684/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of the 31st of December, 2017 the strength of the Permanent Defence Force stood at 9,173 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) personnel. Of this some 6.6%, or 600 personnel, were female, broken down as follows:

- Army: 496 Female Personnel
- Air Corps: 34 Female Personnel
- Naval Service: 70 Female Personnel

The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. This is underlined by a commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the level of female participation in the Defence Forces. In each of the two general service recruitment campaigns conducted in 2017, approximately 13% of the Applicants were female. The figure for cadet Applicants was approximately 15%.

One impediment in achieving greater numbers of women serving in the Defence Forces is the lack of women recruitment applicants relative to men which may be as a result of societal perception and attitudes to female soldiers and officers.

A number of specific initiatives have been implemented to increase the level of female participation such as the targeting of female websites as part of recruitment campaigns and visits to female schools by Defence Forces personnel to promote a career in the Defence Forces to women. Other initiatives include:

- The introduction of best practices in recruitment, such as the adjustment of physical standards for female applicants,
- Special consideration is paid to women as a target group for recruitment,
- A balanced composition between men and women on recruitment and selection boards,
- All promotions and career courses are open to both sexes on merit,
- A Gender Advisor has been appointed to promote gender equality policies and training within the Defence Forces.

The White Paper on Defence recognised a requirement to develop a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and this, along with the associated Action Plan, has been achieved.

Notwithstanding the recent proactive initiatives, over the lifetime of the White Paper further projects will be progressed to ensure that the development and promotion of strategies that support increased female participation in the Defence Forces is continued. Such projects include:

- Developing further initiatives to encourage more women to apply for the Defence Forces and to increase female participation at all ranks.
- Conducting a survey to identify any impediments to the advancement of women in the PDF.

With the support of the Chief of Staff, I remain committed to maximising recruitment of both men and women to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government, both at home and abroad.

Brexit Negotiations

65. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Government has put forward or plans putting forward specific policy proposals for phase two of the Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3507/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Based on the additional Guidelines on the Article 50 negotiations adopted by the European Council on 15 December 2017, work during phase 2 of the negotiations will focus on three distinct areas: completing work on the withdrawal issues and on drafting the Withdrawal Agreement; transitional arrangements and; preparatory work for discussions on the future EU-UK relationship. Ireland has clear positions across all three of these areas and I will continue to articulate these at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) as well as during my bilateral contacts with EU counterparts and with the EU Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, in the coming weeks and months. Through the Permanent Representation in Brussels, Irish officials are engaging on a daily basis with the Commission Taskforce and with the relevant Article 50 preparatory bodies. Their work is being informed and prepared by the cross-Governmental coordination structures convened by my Department. As concerns the withdrawal issues, I welcome that the Guidelines agreed in December underline that negotiations in phase two can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken regarding citizens' rights, the financial settlement and the Irish-specific issues

during the first phase are respected in full and translated faithfully into legal terms as quickly as possible. A key focus in the coming weeks and months will therefore be on completing work on the withdrawal issues and on drafting the relevant parts of the Withdrawal Agreement.

It will also be important to maintain a clear focus on the unique challenges faced by Ireland and I welcome that all aspects of the Irish specific issues will continue to be worked on in a distinct stream of work in phase 2.

As concerns transitional arrangements, I welcome that these have been identified as an early priority in phase 2 and that the European Commission Taskforce proposed additional negotiating Directives on transitional arrangements on 20 December. These draft Directives, which propose a 'status-quo' transitional arrangement, are currently being discussed by the EU27 Member States with a view to their agreement at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) on 29 January which I will attend. Once these additional negotiating directives are agreed by the Council, the Commission will be in a position to begin negotiations with the UK on this issue.

In the Guidelines of 15 December, the European Council also invited the Commission and the Council to continue preparations for the negotiations on the framework for the EU-UK future relationship with a view to agreeing additional Guidelines at the European Council on 22-23 March 2018. In this regard, I welcome that the Guidelines reaffirm the EU's desire to establish a close partnership with the UK. This is in line with Ireland's objective of having the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, including on trade. It is now important for the UK to provide further clarity on what it wants for the future relationship with the EU. The EU remains open to all options, in line with the principles agreed by the European Council.

In the coming weeks and months, Ireland will continue to work closely with its EU partners and the European Commission Task Force, and with the UK, to ensure the commitments made in phase one are delivered in full and that Ireland's wider interests are protected and advanced in the EU's approach to the negotiations on transitional arrangements and the future relationship. In the course of these engagements, as has been the case to date, Ireland will continue, in contacts with the Commission, the European Parliament and other member States, and in the structures of the Council of Ministers, to seek to deliver on our objectives and priorities for the Brexit negotiations. At the same time, I would stress that it is the Commission which is the Union's negotiator, operating within the scope of the guidelines adopted by the European Council and the more detailed negotiating directives adopted by the General Affairs Council.

Brexit Staff

66. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Brexit specific staff sanctioned by Department and State agency to date; the numbers now in place in each of those areas, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3510/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Managing our response to Brexit has impacted on the work of many staff at Headquarters and a significant number of those overseas. It is important to emphasise that our approach has not been merely to recruit or assign additional staff, but rather also to prioritise Brexit in the work of the entire Department. There is no State Agency under the aegis of my Department. Additional staff have been assigned to the key Divisions with responsibility for Brexit matters, the European Union Division and the Ireland, UK and Americas (IUKA) Division, to cover the issues arising from the UK exit process. For operational and service-oriented units like the Passport Office

and Consular service, there has been a marked increase in demand for passports and citizenship via foreign birth registration from applicants in Northern Ireland and in Britain.

Many business units of my Department at headquarters in Dublin are involved in the response to the UK exit. For example the Legal Division, the Trade Division and the Policy Planning Unit. Further information on some of these positions are provided in the table below.

Overseas, additional posts have been assigned to our Embassies in London, Berlin, and Paris as well as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union in Brussels (PRB). Details are provided in the table below.

These measures remain under review. The Department will allocate additional staff resources as deemed necessary to further augment our level of support across Government and across our network.

HQ/Mission	Location	Grade	No.
Mission	London	Counsellor(Jan 2018)	1
Mission	London	First Secretary	1
Mission	London	HEO	1
Mission	London	EO	1
Mission	London	Third Secretary	2
Mission	London	Interns	5
Mission	London	TCOs	
Mission	Paris	Counsellor	1
Mission	Berlin	Counsellor	1
Mission	PRB	Counsellor	1
Mission	PRB	First Secretary	1
Mission	PRB	Third Secretary	1
HQ	EU Division	Counsellor	1
HQ	EU Division	First Secretary	2
HQ	EU Division	Third Secretary	3
HQ	EU Division	CO	1
HQ	Ireland, UK & Americas Division	First Secretary	2
HQ	Ireland, UK & Americas Division	Third Secretary	1
HQ	Communications	First Secretary	1
HQ	Communications	Third Secretary	1
HQ	Legal Division	Assistant Legal Advisor	1
HQ	Trade Division	First Secretary	1
Total			30

Human Rights Cases

67. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the work of his departmental officials with relevant international agencies on Yemen, the Baha'i community in Yemen and the recent sentencing to death of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3605/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): This case is a cause for concern, in particular as the individual appears to have been sentenced on the basis of his religious beliefs. Ireland strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, and attaches great importance to combating all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief and incitement to religious hatred. Ireland consistently raises the issues of

racism and intolerance and advocates for inclusive societies at the UN Human Rights Council, as well as in other multilateral fora. Furthermore, Ireland is unequivocal in its stance on the death penalty. We oppose and condemn its use in all circumstances, and in particular in cases where there are allegations of unfair trials preceding its implementation. The abolition of the death penalty is one of Ireland's international priorities, and my Department regularly conveys our stance on this issue to all countries where the death penalty is still in use.

The conflict in Yemen, now in its third year, has led to grave concerns about human rights and Ireland has worked in the UN system to address these. At the Human Rights Council in September 2017, Ireland joined the small core group of countries that drove forward the adoption of a Resolution on Yemen, which established a group of international experts to investigate the facts in relation to violations of human rights and humanitarian law on the ground. This group will report back to the Human Rights Council, as an important step towards accountability in Yemen.

Among other pressing issues, this resolution expressed concern at the severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief in Yemen, including for members of the Baha'i faith. Ireland calls on all parties to immediately release all Baha'i detained in Yemen due to their religious belief, to cease the issuance of arrest warrants against them and to cease the harassment to which they are subjected.

Officials from this Department also remain in contact with representatives of the Baha'i community in Ireland, with whom they have discussed the situation in Yemen, and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

My Department necessarily prioritises its efforts to promote improvements in the general human rights situation, as it does not have the capacity to actively pursue at EU and international level all of the individual cases that arise. Accordingly, my Department will continue to monitor the human rights situation in Yemen, as well as the issues of freedom of religion and the death penalty, and will take every appropriate opportunity to advocate for them.

As regards cooperation with international agencies on Yemen, Ireland has provided almost €11.5 million in humanitarian assistance to Yemen since 2015, in response to the escalating crisis. Ireland provided €5.3 million in support to Yemen in 2017 alone, the majority of which was channelled through the UN Humanitarian Fund for Yemen, which makes funding available for UN agencies which have the best capacity to deliver services on the ground. Ireland also contributes to global funds that allocate funding to the Yemen crisis, including the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which makes emergency funding readily available for UN agencies. Ireland contributed €22 million to the CERF in 2017.

Finally, a real improvement in the human rights situation in Yemen will require an end to conflict. I would like to assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to support all efforts towards a negotiated settlement to the conflict in that country.

Brexit Negotiations

68. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has prepared contingency plans in the event of all scenarios in advance of Brexit phase two negotiations; if this work is ongoing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3692/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The situation with regard to the Brexit negotiations has evolved significantly since the publication

of the Government's comprehensive approach last May and the Government's preparations have adjusted accordingly. Contingency planning at both a domestic and an EU level is focused on three areas: preparing for a no-deal scenario or so-called "disorderly Brexit"; preparing for a transition period based on the "status quo"; and preparing for the future EU-UK relationship. While the outcome of the December European Council and the move on to Phase 2 has lessened the likelihood of a no-deal scenario, contingency planning for a disorderly Brexit remains a key priority for my Department and for the Government as a whole, because it would have the most serious impact and would occur within a tighter timeframe. This work takes account of the detailed sectoral work carried out by individual Departments and continues to be progressed through cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department. It is also informed by ongoing stakeholder engagement. It is also important to emphasise the value of this work in providing a baseline, worst-case scenario for the policies and sectors impacted, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations.

As concerns transitional arrangements, I welcome that the direction of travel is now firmly towards achieving a "status quo" transition period. Agreement on a "status quo" transition will provide certainty to individuals and businesses while also aiming to avoid any cliff edge effects between the UK leaving the EU and a future relationship agreement coming into force.

The expectation is that the European Council will adopt additional Guidelines at the European Council on 22-23 March 2018 on the framework for the future EU-UK relationship. In this context, the European Council has stressed that it will be important for the UK to provide further clarity on what it wants for the future relationship with the EU.

These guidelines – as well as further clarity on the UK position – will provide a clearer picture of the direction of travel in the negotiations. This will provide a basis on which the Government will, following on from the comprehensive document published last May, further develop our approach to the negotiations and our latest assessment of the economic and sectoral challenges posed by Brexit and how to address them.

This work will, of course, be firmly grounded in the extensive research and preparatory work that has already been undertaken across Government. As the Deputies are aware, a considerable volume of this research and analysis, including on individual sectors, is available in the public domain. I would note in particular the detailed response plan published by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation last November - "*Building Stronger Business – Responding to Brexit by competing, innovation and trading*". A number of further important studies across a range of sectors and issues are underway with a view to publication in the coming weeks and months.

The Government is already acting in order to get Ireland Brexit ready. Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business and a €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector as well as additional supports for capital investment in the food industry and Bord Bia marketing and promotion activities, amounting to over €50m in total. Additional capital expenditure allocation of €4.3bn over four years will also allow the State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead. There was also increased funding provided to my Department for the opening of six new diplomatic missions as part of Global Footprint 2025, which will contribute to helping our exporters find new markets. Our Government's enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams. Brexit will also be a critical factor in our longer-term economic strategy – a new 10-year Capital Plan is in preparation, we're revising our Enterprise 2025 policy and we are in active discussions with the European Investment Bank for a potential increase in investment in the country.

Foreign Policy

69. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on Israel's decision to blacklist an organisation (details supplied) and to block the group's membership from entering the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3652/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government does not support a policy of "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions", or BDS, in relation to Israel. I firmly believe that such an approach is counter-productive, and that it will not help to increase ordinary Israelis' understanding of the sound basis for international concern about the impact of occupation. In relation to the decision taken by Israel to exclude members of certain groups, I believe that this action also does not help to build a better mutual understanding or to move the situation forward. Israel is of course entitled to decide who it allows into its territory, as is any other state. However, I believe that excluding people simply for critical opinions they hold is not the usual practice of a democracy. Moreover, such exclusions also have the effect of denying people access to the occupied Palestinian territory which Israel controls. While the Government does not support a policy of "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions", it is a legitimate and non-violent political viewpoint, albeit one regarded in Israel as hostile.

During my visit to the Middle East last week, I raised this issue directly with Prime Minister Netanyahu. I told him that I believe it is counterproductive and mistaken to exclude, from Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, individuals belonging to groups which have a deep interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I hope that Israel will reconsider this decision.

European Council Meetings

70. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he contributed at the January 2018 EU Council meeting; and the meetings he attended before or after the EU Council meeting. [3444/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I attended the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on Monday 22 January. At this meeting EU Foreign Ministers discussed the post-Cotonou framework for relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries from 2020; developments in Libya; and the Middle East Peace Process. Ministers also held an informal lunch meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. I participated actively in these discussions. On post-Cotonou, I noted that Ireland is a strong supporter of the partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of countries, and that we look forward to contributing to the discussions on the negotiating mandate. The discussion on Libya was a valuable opportunity to receive an update from the UN Secretary General's Special Representative Ghassan Salamé, who briefed Ministers on developments there. At the discussion on the Middle East Peace Process I called on the EU to take an active and positive role. In the margins of the Council I met bilaterally with the Dutch Foreign Minister Mr. Halbe Zijlstra to discuss the Middle East Peace Process.

Foreign Conflicts

71. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the most recent developments in Palestine regarding the possible withdrawal of recognising the state of Israel that was made at an international conference in Madrid in 1991 will be dis-

cussed with his other EU counterparts at the next EU Council meeting. [3063/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Israel was admitted as a Member State of the UN in 1949, and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) recognized Israel as part of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which also set out a path towards a two-state solution. There has understandably been a strong reaction among Palestinians and across the region to the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The EU and its Member States have reaffirmed our belief in a two state solution to the conflict, including the future of Jerusalem as a capital for two states, both Israel and Palestine, and I have made clear that I believe the US announcement was premature and unhelpful.

At the meeting of the PLO Central Council on 14-15 January there was evidently deep frustration not just at the recent US announcement, but also at the lack of progress over the last two decades in building on the Oslo Accords, and making a reality of the two state solution. Some of the statements made at the Central Council included inflammatory rhetoric. The Central Council also produced a set of resolutions, including a decision to assign the Executive Committee of the PLO to suspend recognition of Israel, pending reciprocal recognition of a State of Palestine.

However, this decision has not yet been implemented. It will be for the Chairman of the PLO and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, to decide whether to act on this recommendation, and so far, he has not done so. I believe that the international community should focus on actions, not rhetoric. I note that President Abbas has reaffirmed his opposition to terrorism in all forms, in the course of the Council.

I very strongly urge President Abbas to maintain Palestinian recognition of Israel, something which the mainstream Palestinian movement represented in the PLO and the Palestinian Authority has accepted since 1993.

During my visit to the Middle East earlier this month, when I met I Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and Foreign Minister Malki, I discussed with them the challenges facing the Palestinian people, but also urged them to keep an open mind on any US initiative to reinvigorate the Middle East Peace Process.

My EU colleagues and I met again with President Abbas at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on Monday, and the EU conviction that it would be a major step back to withdraw recognition of Israel was clear. We also reiterated our strong support for the two state solution and for Palestinian aspirations for statehood, as an outcome of an agreement between the Parties.

Syrian Conflict

72. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken at EU Council meetings recently regarding Syria. [2116/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The situation in Syria continues to be one of utmost concern. The conflict, which is now in its seventh year, has cost an estimated half a million lives. Over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, and over 5.5 million have fled to neighboring countries and the wider region. An end to the violence is urgently needed in order to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people. The UN is leading political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communique and UN Security Council resolution 2254, which calls for an end to violence; release of political prisoners; formation of a transitional governing body with executive powers and a constitutional reform process. Ireland fully supports this process and

the work of UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. The EU provides direct assistance to the UN-led Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground. The EU Syria Peace Process Support Initiative aims to facilitate the peace process, build the capacity of opposition parties and contribute to dialogue with civil society in support of the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria. Ireland and the EU also provide support, including financial support, to a broad range of mechanisms to ensure legal accountability for all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria.

Since 2012 Ireland has contributed over €90 million to the international humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, including €25 million in 2017. Through our annual contributions to the EU institutions Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response to the crisis. The EU and its Member States have together mobilised more than €9.5 billion for humanitarian and resilience assistance to support Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring countries, making the EU the largest single donor to the effort. The EU will host another donors' conference for Syria in 2018.

I participated in the discussion at the December EU Foreign Affairs Council on the discussion of the regional situation in the Middle East, including of course the urgent need for progress towards peace in Syria. I joined colleagues in stressing the primacy of the UN-led Geneva process and the need for an inclusive political transition in Syria.

Property Tax Exemptions

73. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if an exemption from local property tax will be granted for a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3561/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that any building or structure which is used as, or is suitable for use as a dwelling is liable to LPT. For LPT purposes, the state of dereliction of a property is not relevant where it (the property) is actually occupied as a dwelling house. However, a property that is uninhabitable to such an extent that it is not suitable for occupation (and not actually occupied) is not taxable.

The Act also provides for a number of exemptions from LPT where certain qualifying criteria are met. Specifically, Section 5(2) of the Act sets out the qualifying criteria in respect of property owners who are in long term care in a nursing home. The particular qualifying criteria requires that the property must have been occupied as the person's sole or main residence and vacated due to his or her inability to continue living there because of infirmity. The nature and duration of the infirmity must also be independently verified and certified by a doctor.

Any property that qualified for the exemption on 1 May 2013 remains exempt for the duration of the current 'valuation period' (to 31 October 2019) provided that it is not occupied by any other person. A property that becomes eligible for the exemption on a date after 1 May 2013 only qualifies from the next 'liability date' (1 November) for the remainder of the 'valuation period', for example 1 November 2017 in respect of 2018 and 2019.

Revenue has confirmed to me that no LPT has been paid in respect of the property in question for the years 2012 (Household Charge) to 2018 and has been deferred. As a consequence of the deferral the liability has attached as a charge on the property and is accumulating interest at a rate of 4% per annum. From the information available to Revenue, the property has only

relatively recently become vacant which means that the exemption can only apply with effect from 1 November 2017 in respect of 2018 and 2019 and the liabilities for the previous years (2012 to 2017) remain due. The deferred liabilities in respect of 2012 to 2017 would be paid when the property is sold or disposed of.

Revenue has confirmed that it will engage directly with a nominated representative of the person in question, including the Deputy's office as appropriate, to clarify the person's entitlement to the exemption and to agree a position in regard to any payable arrears. This could include a continuation of the deferral in respect of the relevant years i.e. 2012 to 2017 or a suitable payment arrangement that takes account of the person's personal circumstances.

Ministerial Meetings

74. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when he last met formally with the CEOs of banks (details supplied); when he is next due to meet each person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3527/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I met formally with the CEOs of Bank of Ireland and PTSB on the 23rd of October 2017 and with the CEO of AIB on the 24th October 2017.

It is my intention to meet with all three CEOs again in the near future and my office is currently working to schedule these meetings.

Departmental Banking

75. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of bank accounts operated by his Department; the names of the financial institutions at which the accounts are held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3531/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department operates 4 accounts with Danske Bank for the purposes of the Vote for the Office of the Minister for Finance. The Department also provides accounting services to 6 other Votes on a shared services basis and, in that respect, it operates on 10 accounts with Danske Bank. In regard to accounts at the Central Bank, the Department operates on the Central Fund (Exchequer) Current and Deposit Accounts and the Paymaster General Supply and Drawing Accounts. My Department also operates on 18 other accounts at the Central Bank on its own behalf and in respect of other entities in accordance with relevant statutory provisions. My Department is currently assisting the Office of Government Procurement with a public procurement process for the provision of government banking services.

Financial Services Sector

76. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of lenders and value of lending in the car finance PCP sector by companies that are operating with section 110 tax status, including a company (details supplied); his plans to act on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3566/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 sets out a regime for the taxation of special purpose companies set up to securitise

assets. The tax provisions are intended to create a tax neutral regime for securitisation and structured finance purposes.

I am advised by Revenue that qualifying companies (within the meaning of section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997) may only hold certain “qualifying assets”. The list of qualifying assets that these companies may hold includes loans, leases, hire purchase contracts, and obligations evidencing debt.

In addition, I am advised by Revenue that there is no requirement for a section 110 company to provide information regarding the specific type of “qualifying asset” it holds on its corporation tax return. Revenue is therefore not in a position to provide the data requested.

In relation to taxpayer specific information, Revenue is precluded, by taxpayer confidentiality, from providing details on a specific company or taxpayer.

Motor Insurance

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the date his Department officially requested advice from the Attorney General in relation to the collapse of a company (details supplied) following the decision handed down by the Supreme Court; when he expects that advice to be forthcoming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3568/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Setanta Insurance was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

As you are aware, the Supreme Court delivered its judgment on 25 May 2017 and overturned the previous decisions of the High Court and the Court of Appeal that the Motor Insurers’ Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) was liable in respect of third party motor insurance claims made against the policyholders of Setanta Insurance. The consequence of this is that the Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) has been deemed responsible for the payment of such third party claims subject to a limit of 65% (or €825,000, whichever is the lesser) due to relevant claimants.

As I have previously indicated, there is a legal concern that any Government intervention to compensate third party claimants over and above the 65% limit, and then “step into the shoes” of these claimants to recover directly any balance due from the Setanta liquidation could result in the Government having a lower status in the creditor hierarchy, and thus significantly reduce the amount it could recoup from the liquidator.

In this respect, my Department initially sought advice from the Office of the Attorney General on 20 July 2017 and received a reply on 4 August 2017. Subsequent to this a procurement process was commenced to obtain the services of a Maltese law firm to provide advice in relation to this concern. Following the receipt of advices from the successful tenderer on 17 November 2017 and 5 December 2017, a further request for advice was sent to the Office of the Attorney General on 7 December 2017. The Office of the Attorney General provided this advice to my Department on 15 December 2017.

Subsequently, officials from my Department met with the Liquidator on 9 January and received an update on the current status of the liquidation process as well as the issues he is encountering in settling claims. Based on this up to date information and the legal advices, the various courses of action open to the Government in relation to this issue are actively being considered.

VAT Rate Application

78. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding VAT rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3631/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of the EU VAT Directive with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with the Value-Added Consolidation Act, 2010 the supply of the service of the installation of a fixture is liable to tax at the reduced rate of 13.5%. The installation of a floor or other fixture qualifies for the reduced rate where the floor becomes an integral part of the property and cannot be removed without substantial damage being caused to the floor itself or to the property.

Where a service constitutes the installation of a floor or other goods that can be removed without causing any damage to the floor or other goods or to the property then that service is the installation of a fitting, which is liable to the standard rate of 23%. The service provider should determine on a case by case basis whether the service provided is the installation of fixtures liable at the 13.5% rate or the installation of fittings liable at the 23% rate.

Where a supply includes the supply and installation of fixtures in a property, the supply is subject to the two-thirds rule, which requires that to benefit from the 13.5% rate the value of the goods cannot exceed two thirds of the total amount of the supply.

Where a service provider is providing a service of installation of fixtures to certain Principal Contractors, it is the Principal Contractor who is liable to VAT at 13.5% rather than the service provider.

Derelict Sites

79. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason there have been delays in processing the deed of waiver in relation to the transfer of a derelict site in Charlestown to Fingal County Council which was submitted on 24 November 2017 with no formal response or acknowledgment of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3530/18]

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.

An application for waiver of this property has been made by Fingal County Council, which is being reviewed by the CSSO. A response to Fingal County Council will issue shortly from the CSSO outlining any additional information that may be required in advance of full consideration of the application.

Office of Public Works

80. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works will acquire a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3598/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works have no current requirement for additional accommodation in the Killarney area and therefore it is not intended to purchase the property.

School Transport Eligibility

81. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a transport grant was discontinued for a person (details supplied). [3539/18]

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

Currently over 115,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The child in question is eligible for school transport under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs and the family availed of a Special Transport Grant while he attended his previous school as there was no transport service available.

However, in 2015 the child in question changed school and Bus Éireann advised that he could be accommodated on an existing school transport service.

A Special Transport Grant is not generally considered where a reasonable level of transport service is available and the family were informed of this position in May 2016.

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

DEIS Applications

82. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when successful DEIS applications will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3546/18]

83. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for DEIS by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3547/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 83 together.

There is no application process for DEIS therefore schools are not required to apply for assessment in DEIS. Every primary and post-primary school was assessed as part of the DEIS Identification process provided under DEIS Plan 2017. Full details of the methodology used is available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>.

A further assessment of all schools is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data combined with the updated Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census.

Should this exercise reveal that any school, which did not qualify for DEIS in 2017, meets the criteria applicable to schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage based on the updated information then additional schools may be included subject to available resources.

Schools Building Projects Status

84. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the permanent school buildings which are planned to replace the existing semi-permanent buildings of schools (details supplied); when it is expected that construction will begin; when it is expected construction will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3573/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school building projects which are referred to by the Deputy are at Tender Award Stage. It is expected that a contract will be awarded in the first quarter of 2018 and work will commence on site. The construction period is 12 months with anticipated occupation of the permanent accommodation by the schools in Q1 2019. My officials have been in contact with the schools concerned recently to bring them up to date on these Developments.

Schools Site Acquisitions

85. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress which has been made with regard to locating a permanent site for a school (details supplied); if his Department has directed Dublin City Council to actively engage with landowners with a view to securing such a site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3594/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The acquisition of a site to accommodate a permanent building for the school to which the Deputy refers is at a very advanced stage and the conveyancing process is underway.

Technological Universities

86. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a building (details supplied) will be acquired with a view to converting it and using it to provide third level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3599/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Projects in Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tralee have been identified for inclusion in the Higher Education PPP Programme announced recently. These critical investments on existing campuses will help drive the Munster Technological University (MTU) proposal forward.

We have received a submission regarding the building referred to by the Deputy. We have reviewed this submission. Given our commitments in progressing the MTU at its existing campus locations, the Department has no plans to acquire a separate site for the MTU at this time.

Schools Building Projects Status

87. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his Department will award a full tender for construction of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3641/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In July 2017 the Stage 2b (Detailed Design) was approved, pending the completion of the process to carry out a shortlisting of suitably qualified building contractors and sub-contractors. The Prequalification process to select the shortlist of contractors is nearing completion. Once completed the Department will be issuing an authorisation for this project to proceed to tender stage.

Capitation Grants

88. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated full year cost if the capitation grant at primary level was increased from €170 to €178 per pupil and from €296 to €310 at post primary level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3695/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The estimated cost of increasing the rate of capitation by €8 per pupil in primary schools is circa €4.7m.

The estimated cost of increasing the rate of capitation by €14 per pupil in post-primary schools is circa €5.1m.

I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

Budget 2018 marks the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe within a decade. In 2018, the budget for the Department of Education will increase by €554 million to over €10 billion.

Capitation funding remains a priority for me to address as part of the Action Plan.

The process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. Circular 0079/2017 outlines the current rate increases in order to enable schools to implement the arbitration salary increase for grant-funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

Garda Data

89. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank in the community policing unit in Coolock, Raheny, Clontarf and Howth Garda stations in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3526/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in

the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The stations referred to by the Deputy are located in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division, I am advised by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the DMR North Division on 31 December 2017 was 670 of whom 47 were community Gardaí. There are 45 Garda Reserves and 39 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 123 of whom have been assigned to the DMR North Division. Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - an increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year, which will see Garda numbers reach more than 14,000 by the end of 2018.

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

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

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural – has its own concerns and expectations.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda National Model of Community Policing plays a key part in responding to crime by taking into account and responding to local conditions and needs. Clear objectives are set, such as high visibility in the community, ease of contact by members of the public, and enhanced support for crime prevention strategies. Community policing is not, of course, confined to dedicated Community Gardaí, all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. In addition, the National Community Policing Office, attached to the Garda Community Relations Bureau, captures best practice in community policing initiatives and disseminates these practices through its communication network.

An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 places a strong

emphasis on developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation and enhancing the current delivery model so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security.

Undoubtedly, the on-going recruitment process will support all Garda activities and will enhance Garda visibility within our communities and the provision of effective community policing across all Garda Divisions including the DMR North Division.

The information provided by the Commissioner in relation to the Deputy's request is set out in the tables.

Community Garda by Station 31 December 2015			
STATION	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
Coolock	2	14	16
Raheny	1	6	7
Clontarf	0	5	5
Howth	0	3	3

Community Garda by Station 31 December 2016			
STATION	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
Coolock	2	12	14
Raheny	1	4	5
Clontarf	0	5	5
Howth	0	3	3

Community Garda by Station 31 December 2017			
STATION	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
Coolock	1	6	7
Raheny	1	3	4
Clontarf	0	5	5
Howth	0	2	2

Magdalen Laundries

90. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has issued payments from the ex-gratia Magdalene restorative justice scheme to the 19 women whose payments were being delayed by his Department on the basis that the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provisions were not yet in place; if not, the date by which he plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3532/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There has been a delay in making payments to certain women where there are issues relating to capacity, which may render them vulnerable to financial exploitation. The terms of the scheme provide for lump sum payments ranging from €11,500 to €100,000, special access to healthcare, upgrading of pension entitlements to the full State pension for those who have reached retirement age and payment of a weekly sum of €100 inclusive of other State payments to others.

There are currently 17 cases as described in this question. It was intended that the Decision Support Service (DSS) to be established under the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 would be the most effective option in such cases, where there was no existing protective mechanism in place such as an enduring power of attorney or being a ward of court. However, new administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission, a body under the Department of Health,

must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act can be commenced. A high-level Steering Group is overseeing the establishment of the DSS.

Pending the establishment of the DSS, my officials have been encouraging the use of other options to allow payments to be made and they continue to examine what other options may be available. In this respect, 3 women are in the application process to be made Wards of Court.

By way of general information, to date 686 applicants to the Magdalen Restorative ex-gratia Scheme have received their ex-gratia payments at a cost of €25.7m. As you will be aware the Scheme remains open to new applicants.

Garda Deployment

91. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new gardaí that have been allocated to County Louth since the re-opening of the Templemore Garda College, by location; the overall increase in the Garda numbers in County Louth, by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3541/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The Garda strength of the Louth Division on 31 December 2017 was 319 with 25 Garda Reserves and 26 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 61 have been assigned to the Louth Division with 25 allocated to Drogheda Garda Station and 36 to Dundalk Garda Station. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - an increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, reach 14,000 by the end of 2018.

In addition, a further 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical du-

ties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

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

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and class-room based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the number of Gardaí allocated to the Louth Division each year since the Garda College reopened in 2014 to 31 December 2017 shows an overall increase of 38 Gardaí assigned to the Division as set out in the table.

DISTRICT	STATION	2014	2015	2016	2017
ARDEE	ARDEE	27	26	25	29
	CASTLEBELLINGHAM	2	2	2	2
	COLLON	5	5	5	5
	LOUTH	1	1	1	1
	TOTAL	35	34	33	37
DROGHEDA	CLOUGHERHEAD	4	3	3	2
	DROGHEDA	92	97	95	105
	DUNLEER	5	6	6	6
	TOTAL	101	106	104	113
DUNDALK	BLACKROCK	4	3	4	4
	CARLINGFORD	6	6	5	4
	DRUMAD	7	7	7	7
	DUNDALK	119	123	141	147
	HACKBALLSCROSS	5	4	5	4
	OMEATH	4	4	3	3
	TOTAL	145	147	165	169
	LOUTH TOTAL	281	287	302	319

Garda Reports

92. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the report into the Jobstown protest which his Department received from An Garda Síochána on 26 July 2017 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3544/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): While it is not the standard practice of my Department to publish official reports received from An Garda Síochána, to be of assistance on this occasion, I can inform the Deputy that I intend to furnish him with the report, as requested, in the coming days. The Deputy will appreciate that the report may require

specific redactions in respect of any third-party information contained in it.

Garda Data

93. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí based at stations (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3570/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

Coolock, Raheny, Santry and Howth Garda Stations form part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. The Garda strength of the DMR North Division on 31 December 2017 was 670 with 45 Garda Reserves and 39 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 123 have been assigned to the DMR North Division. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - an increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, reach 14,000 by the end of 2018.

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

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

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the table below, the number of Gardaí attached to Coolock, Raheny, Santry and Howth Garda Stations in each of the years 2011 to 2017.

Garda Strength by Station 2011-2017							
STATION	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Coolock	117	114	112	109	103	105	103
Raheny	68	64	62	62	67	66	68
Santry	81	102	95	90	82	81	76
Howth	39	42	38	31	27	27	26

Garda Data

94. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to the drugs unit in the R district of the Dublin Metropolitan Region north division in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [3571/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am advised by the Commissioner that Garda Drug Unit personnel are assigned on a Divisional basis and that the Garda District referred to by the Deputy is part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R.) North Division. I am informed that the total number of Divisional Drug Unit personnel as of 31 December 2017, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 236 of whom 19 were allocated to the D.M.R. North Division. The number of Gardaí allocated to the Drugs Unit of the DMR North Division for the other years sought by the Deputy is as set out in the table below.

As the Deputy will be aware all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences, crime or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction.

An Garda Síochána's National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, which was established in 2015, continues to lead out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. In this regard the Bureau continues its policy of working with Garda Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level.

This work is further supported by other national units, including the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide. Multi-disciplinary approaches are also utilised to ensure that those involved in illicit activity are effectively targeted including through the use of the proceeds of crime legislation, money laundering legislation and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau. I am informed that this approach adopts good practice in implementing a co-ordinated use of Garda resources and in utilising available criminal law to its fullest extent in tackling all forms of organised crime, including drug trafficking.

We have also seen unprecedented international cooperation between An Garda Síochána and policing services in other jurisdictions leading to important arrests and drug seizures.

Underpinning all these measures is this Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community

engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 123 of whom were assigned to the DMR North Division. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - an increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources he needs to allow him to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across the organisation including the Divisional Drugs Units.

Drugs Unit Personnel D.M.R. North Division 2011-2017	
2011	32
2012	31
2013	27
2014	16
2015	25
2016	21
2017	19

Garda Equipment

95. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles provided to the R district of the Dublin Metropolitan Region north division for each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018; the number of new vehicles allocated in the same period; and the number of vehicles decommissioned in the same period, in tabular form. [3572/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the 'R' District is made up of Swords, Malahide and Coolock Garda Stations and is part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region - North Division. The allocation of vehicles within a Division is a matter for the Divisional Officer.

Details of the number of vehicles allocated, decommissioned and the current numbers allocated to the Dublin Metropolitan Region - North Division are outlined in the tables.

Garda Fleet - DMR North Division 2016-2018

		Cars		Vans	Motor-cycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
		Marked	Un-marked					
As on 31/12/2016	Total	36	50	32	2	1	5	126
BALBRIGGAN-Y	5	3	2	0	0	0	10	
BALLYMUN	13	23	23	2	1	5	67	

24 January 2018

		Cars		Vans	Motor-cycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
		Marked	Un-marked					
COOLOCK-R	9	14	3	0	0	0	26	
RAHENY-J	9	10	4	0	0	0	23	
As on 31/12/2017	Total	33	50	27	1	1	3	115
	BAL-BRIG-GAN-Y	5	4	2	0	0	0	11
	BALLY-MUN	12	21	19	1	1	3	57
	CO-OLOCK-R	8	14	2	0	0	0	24
	RA-HENY-J	8	11	4	0	0	0	23
As on 22/1/2018	Total	33	49	27	1	1	3	114
	BAL-BRIG-GAN-Y	5	4	2	0	0	0	11
	BALLY-MUN	12	20	19	1	1	3	56
	CO-OLOCK-R	8	14	2	0	0	0	24
	RA-HENY-J	8	11	4	0	0	0	23

Garda Fleet - Vehicles Allocated - DMR North Division 2016-2018

		Cars		Vans	Motor-cycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
		Marked	Un-marked					
As on 31/12/2016	Total	2	8	8	1	0	2	21
BALBRIG-GAN-Y	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	
BALLYMUN	1	4	6	1	0	2	14	
COOLOCK-R	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	
RAHENY-J	1	2	1	0	0	0	4	
As on 31/12/2017	Total	2	5	3	0	0	0	10
	BAL-BRIG-GAN-Y	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	BALLY-MUN	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
	CO-OLOCK-R	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
	RA-HENY-J	1	1	0	0	0	0	2

Questions - Written Answers

		Cars		Vans	Motor-cycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
		Marked	Un-marked					
As on 22/1/2018	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	BAL-BRIG-GAN-Y	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	BALLY-MUN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	CO-OLOCK-R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	RA-HENY-J	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Vehicles Decommissioned - DMR North Division 2016

		Cars		Vans	Motor-cycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
		Marked	Un-marked					
As on 31/12/2016	Total	4	12	5	1	1	2	25
BALBRIG-GAN-Y	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	
BALLY-MUN	1	6	4	1	1	1	14	
COOLOCK-R	2	3	0	0	0	0	5	
RAHENY-J	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	
As on 31/12/2017	Total	4	7	8	0	0	0	19
	BAL-BRIG-GAN-Y	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	BALLY-MUN	2	2	7	0	0	0	11
	CO-OLOCK-R	1	4	1	0	0	0	6
	RA-HENY-J	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
As on 22/1/2018	Total	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	BAL-BRIG-GAN-Y	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	BALLY-MUN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	CO-OLOCK-R	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	RA-HENY-J	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Courts Service

96. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on

complaints made to the European Commission in relation to a systematic problem in the application of EU law on the the Unfair Contract Terms Directive in mortgage possession proceedings in Irish courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3600/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions and in the management and conduct of cases which come before them.

I wish to confirm to the Deputy that this matter was raised with the Irish Government by the EU Commission last year and a delegation met with the Commission in Brussels in September 2017 comprising a number of Government Departments, including my own, to explain the position as regards the implementation of the provisions of the Directive in the context of actions for possession in the Irish Courts. This meeting was followed by a detailed submission to the Commission in November 2017.

Proposed Legislation

97. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Gambling Protection Bill will be enacted; the timeframe for the office of the proposed gambling regulator as set out in the Bill to be set up; the number of staff that will be employed in this office; the expertise required of these staff; the way in which they will be recruited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3661/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the proposed Gambling Control Bill.

The Government, on 10 January, 2018, approved the updating of the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill. The proposed updating follows on from the review work undertaken in the Department of Justice and Equality over the past year and consultations with interested stakeholders. Changes to the Scheme will be subject to further consultations with the Office of the Attorney General and other relevant Departments.

The critical update approved by the Government was for the establishment of an independent regulatory authority for gambling. This decision was taken on the basis that such a body would be best placed to conduct the complex range of licensing, regulating, monitoring, inspecting and enforcement tasks, etc. of the growing gambling industry in all of its facets. This independent approach would also mirror the approach taken in most EU Member States and beyond.

The proposed independent regulator involves a change of approach from the 2013 General Scheme which proposed that the regulatory function, etc., would be discharged by the Minister for Justice and Equality, acting through the Office for Gambling Control Ireland, an Executive Office within the Department of Justice and Equality, but not a statutorily independent agency.

In the context of reviewing and updating the General Scheme in all necessary aspects, I received Government approval to establish a Working Group, chaired by myself, comprising all stakeholder Departments, relevant Offices and the Office of the Attorney General. The Working Group will have its first meeting on 2 February 2018. I hope that the Group can submit a final report to Government in mid to late 2018.

I expect that this Group will, amongst its other tasks, contribute to developing the structure of the proposed regulatory authority, including the staffing numbers, skills and expertise re-

quired and other issues. I will be engaging with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the recruitment of such staff at the appropriate time.

The Deputy may also be aware that the General Scheme of the Civil Law and Courts (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 received Government approval in July 2017. This Bill will, inter alia, provide for a number of specific changes to the current antiquated Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956. These changes are limited in nature and primarily address the better regulation of fund raising activities at local level for charitable and philanthropic purposes.

Garda Deployment

98. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí attached to the Cavan-Monaghan Garda division as of 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3693/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The Garda strength of the Cavan/Monaghan Division on 31 December 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, was 329 with 11 Garda Reserves and 38 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 40 have been assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - an increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, reach 14,000 by the end of 2018.

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

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

For the Deputy's information I have set out below in tabular form the number of Gardaí attached to the Cavan/Monaghan Garda Division on 31 December 2015, 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017.

Personnel Strength of Cavan/Monaghan Division	
Date	Total
December 2015	318
December 2016	318
December 2017	329

Garda Equipment

99. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of marked and unmarked Garda cars and marked Garda vans attached to the Cavan-Monaghan Garda division as of 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3694/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the number of Garda cars and vans attached to the Cavan/Monaghan Division for the years 2016 to 2018 are as set out in the table below.

Cavan/Monaghan Division	Unmarked Cars	Marked Cars	Vans
As at 1/1/2016	30	15	7
As at 1/1/2017	30	16	8
As at 1/1/2018	29	15	8

State Aid

100. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Government has sought changes to State aid rules in view of Brexit; the changes, the specific efforts and or requests made by the Government to date regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3508/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Officials of my Department have had discussions with senior officials from DG Competition to sensitise them to both the potential and the real difficulties encountered by Irish businesses as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU. Furthermore, in November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager. An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from DG Comp, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Agriculture. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprise impacted by Brexit in line with

State Aid rules. The work of this Group has already commenced and it is due to have its third meeting in February 2018. In between these meetings, there has been engagement on specific issues in order to continue to progress matters. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

Brexit Issues

101. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Government has sought EU funding support for Irish enterprises exposed to Brexit; if so, the nature of the support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3509/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme announced during Budget 2018 will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or which will be in the future. The Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

Support from the European Commission and EIB Group through its InnovFin counter Guarantee has enabled the €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) to be leveraged to provide a €300 million fund. The Brexit Loan Scheme will provide support for businesses to innovate or adapt their businesses to face the challenges of Brexit.

The Scheme will be open to businesses of up to 499 employees, which can also demonstrate that they are significantly exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of Brexit. They must be a viable business, doing business in Ireland, and they must have a business development strategy. The scheme will be open both to State Agency clients and those businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies.

My officials are working closely with the EIB group on the development of future schemes to support Irish businesses impacted by Brexit which would be structured to benefit from EIB supports.

Brexit Issues

102. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the EU level supports that have been put in place, such as changes to State aid rules and adaptation grants for Irish enterprises exposed to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3511/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Officials of my Department have had discussions with senior officials from DG Competition of the EU Commission to sensitise them to both the potential and the real difficulties encountered by Irish businesses as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU. Furthermore, in November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager. An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from DG Comp, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Agriculture. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. The work of this Group has already commenced and it is due to have its third face to face meeting in February 2018. In between these meetings, there

has been engagement on specific issues in order to continue to progress matters. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

As one part of a suite of measures to mitigate against the effects of Brexit; a Rescue & Restructuring (R&R) Scheme notified to the Commission was approved in late November 2017. Under the €10 million scheme which will run until 2020, Enterprise Ireland can provide restructuring support to businesses in financial difficulties. This scheme has been put in place as it is considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary. However, I do not expect that there will be a need for the State to provide rescue/restructuring aid to companies.

The Brexit Loan Scheme will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or will be in the future. Support from the European Commission and EIB Group through its InnovFin Loan counter guarantee means the €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) can be leveraged to provide a €300 million fund. The Brexit Loan Scheme will provide support for businesses to innovate or adapt to face the challenges of Brexit. The Scheme will be open to businesses of up to 499 employees, which can demonstrate that they are significantly exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of Brexit. They must be a viable business, doing business in Ireland, and they must have a business development strategy demonstrating that they plan to innovate or adapt in response to Brexit.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

103. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medication is no longer covered for those that hold a medical card (details supplied); if he will review this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3498/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key objective of the health service. However, the challenge is to do this in an affordable and sustainable manner. The medicines bill for the community drugs schemes – primarily the GMS, Long Term Illness and Drugs Payment schemes and the High Tech Arrangement – is forecast at just over €1.7 billion in 2017.

To ensure patients receive the highest quality care, resources invested in medicines must be used efficiently and effectively. This requires an integrated approach to secure best value for money for all treatments, greater efficiencies in the supply chain and the use of the most cost-effective treatments.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plaster is licensed for the symptomatic relief of neuropathic pain associated with previous herpes zoster (shingles) infection, known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), in adults. It was reimbursed in the community drugs schemes from 2010. The projected budget impact was low due to the specific licensed indication but total expenditure has increased significantly, from €9.4 million in 2012 to over €30 million in 2016, mainly from off-license use for pain not associated with shingles.

An HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) review of this product highlighted that the clinical evidence for its use in PHN is limited due to lack of comparative data and its value is uncertain for all other types of pain. The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics estimated that, in Ireland, between 5-10% of prescribing of this product has been for the licensed

indication of PHN.

Following the MMP review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement system for the product from 1 September 2017. This process supports the appropriate use of Versatis, ensuring that PHN patients continue to receive this treatment. The HSE estimates that this protocol will reduce annual expenditure on this product by approximately 90%.

Under the protocol, all patients who were receiving antivirals for shingles were automatically approved for the lidocaine medicated plaster for three months. No action was required by GPs and the patient's pharmacy was notified of his or her approval status.

These patients were identified and automatically registered on the HSE-PCRS system for three months and continued to receive the treatment from their pharmacy until 30 November 2017. However, from 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients no longer received this item under the community drugs schemes. The HSE has produced information leaflets for patients and advised GPs on treatment alternatives.

In exceptional circumstances, the product may be approved for supply through the community schemes for unlicensed indications. GPs apply for reimbursement for unlicensed indications through the online system. The MMP reviews applications before a decision is made and communicated to the GP.

Full details of the review are available on the HSE website at <http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/medicinemanagementprogramme/yourmedicines/lidocaine-plaster/lidocaine-medicated-plaster.html>.

This decision is a matter for the HSE. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Services for People with Disabilities

104. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the allocation of a dietician for autistic services in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3516/18]

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

Disability Services Data

105. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged 0 to 6 and 6 to 18 years of age with autistic spectrum disorder that are being or were diagnostically assessed on a monthly basis, by county in each of the years 2014 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3517/18]

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

Autism Support Services

106. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of posts required to deliver full diagnostic assessments and support services to children on a waiting list with autistic spectrum disorder in County Waterford; the number of posts required on an ongoing basis to deliver the necessary therapies and supports for those children based on current trends; the details of the posts for occupational therapists, psychologists, speech and language therapists posts under relevant headings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3518/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

107. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Waterford aged 6 to 18 years of age awaiting ASD diagnostic assessments [3519/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

108. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a permanent psychologist

for children with autism aged between 6 and 18 years of age will be appointed to HSE disability services at Waterford community services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3520/18]

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

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

109. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting lists for occupational therapy assessments for children with autism between 6 to 18 years of age in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3521/18]

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

General Practitioner Data

110. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole time equivalent general practitioners per CHO area; and the number registered to provide free care to children under 6 years of age per CHO, in tabular form. [3523/18]

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

Health Services Staff Data

111. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole time equivalent public health nurses per CHO, in tabular form. [3524/18]

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

HSE Funding

112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a request from the HSE for additional funding to allow for the restoration of pay for workers in a section 39 organisation (details supplied) as per the Labour Court recommendation of 20 November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2123/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE brought the Labour Court recommendation in question to the attention of the Department. Arrangements are being finalised for a process to establish the factual position regarding pay reductions and pay restoration in the Section 39 organisations. It is anticipated that this process will bring about the necessary clarity and transparency as well as an agreed way forward for all parties involved. I am continuing to engage with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to the final details including the implementation of this process.

Health Services Funding

113. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if a service (details supplied) can be run by a community centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3536/18]

118. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if a centre (details supplied) in Dublin 5 is due to close on 31 January 2018 due to a lack of funds; and if the necessary funds will be made available to retain this community information resource for the area. [3595/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 118 together.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputies.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when the freestyle libre will be available on the long term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3543/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

115. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for an MRI scan for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [3556/18]

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.

Ambulance Service

116. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken in relation to the inadequate ambulance service in Connemara, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3590/18]

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

Ambulance Service Provision

117. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to an event involving a person (details supplied); his views on the matter; the nature and details of an investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3591/18]

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

Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 113.

Commencement of Legislation

119. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for the commencement of sections 20 to 23 of the Children and Family Relationship Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3596/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Officials in my Department are undertaking the work necessary to facilitate the commencement of Parts 2 & 3, including Sections 20 - 23, of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. We are working to resolve a small number of technical issues in order to ensure that the processes associated with Parts 2 & 3 of the Act can be commenced. I hope to be in a position to lay the Regulations before the Houses of the Oireachtas as early as possible in 2018.

Hospital Appointments Status

120. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment at the Royal Victoria eye and ear hospital for a cor-

rective eye procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3602/18]

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.

Hospital Charges

121. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 13 December 2017, if his departmental officials have examined the matter and provided him with advice following his receipt of the petition in favour of removing the in-patient day case charge for haemochromatosis patients; if he will now make a decision on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3610/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The issue of the application of the public in-patient charge of €80 for venesection in Acute Hospitals, as well as the broader issues in relation to the treatment of patients with Hereditary Haemochromatosis, is currently being considered in my Department.

Home Help Service Data

122. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Laois that were granted home help hours in 2017; the number that were wait listed; and the number of those still waiting to be provided with a home help. [3632/18]

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.

Health Services

123. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when persons attending a service (details supplied) in County Westmeath can use a facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3660/18]

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

National Maternity Hospital

124. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if the public ownership of the new maternity hospital will be guaranteed in view of public concern regarding the ownership of the new hospital; if the proposed site for the building will transfer to public ownership; if it will entail a loan, licence or a lease; if assurance will be provided to the public in this regard prior to the final agreement being reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3663/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A draft legal framework is currently being finalised which will inter alia ensure that the State's significant investment in the new hospital will be protected. Pending its finalisation and sign off by all stake holders, it would be premature to provide any further details at this stage.

GLAS Payments

125. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a 2016 GLAS payment has not been issued to a person (details supplied); the issue causing the delay in payment being approved; the status of the 2017 GLAS payment for the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3537/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received the 85% advance payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that has delayed the payment of the 2016 GLAS balance and the 2017 advance. A solution has been identified and is being implemented. GLAS 2017 advance payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

GLAS Payments

126. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3553/18]

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 and has received full payments in respect of the 2015 and 2016 scheme years.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that resulted in the 2017 advance payment not being made. A solution has been identified and it is expected that the payment will issue shortly. GLAS 2017 advance payments continue to issue on a weekly basis.

GLAS Payments

127. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3558/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The GLAS participation of the person named was subject to inspection and a letter advising of the final outcome of the inspection has issued. Once all issues relating to the inspection have been finalised this case will move to the payment stage.

GLAS Payments

128. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3592/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015. The applicant has received payments in respect of 2015 and 2016 scheme years.

An issue arose that delayed the payment of the 2017 GLAS advance. Department officials have now resolved the issue and the case will progress to the payment stage. It is expected that the 2017 advance payment will be sent for payment in the coming week.

GLAS Applications

129. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a GLAS 3 application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3603/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017.

Validation checks must be passed on all actions on GLAS claims and all cases must clear these checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete these checks on all claims to allow for the issue of payments. Once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are issuing on a weekly basis.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

130. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal in respect of a 2017 BPS application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3609/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application under the 2017 BPS on 15 April 2017. In order to qualify for payment under the BPS an applicant must have an eligible hectare of land in respect of each entitlement held.

My Department actively investigated incidents of illegal burning during 2017 as the lands affected are deemed ineligible for the purposes of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

The person named was notified by my Department on 4 December 2017 in relation the burned land parcels on his application, and has submitted an appeal. This appeal will be examined with a view to an early resolution. Should additional information be required, my Department will contact the person named directly.

GLAS Data

131. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in the GLAS scheme in 2016 and 2017, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3629/18]

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

County	GLAS 1	GLAS 2	GLAS 3	Total
Carlow	277	127	126	530
Cavan	903	431	541	1,875
Clare	1,613	687	810	3,110
Cork	2,145	1,001	946	4,092
Donegal	1,934	1,002	1,410	4,346
Dublin	60	17	19	96
Galway	3,065	1,302	1,583	5,950
Kerry	1,767	868	764	3,399
Kildare	245	78	114	437
Kilkenny	429	207	191	827
Laois	368	193	235	796
Leitrim	1,016	419	530	1,965
Limerick	1,046	301	406	1,753
Longford	511	343	330	1,184
Louth	146	78	96	320
Mayo	2,550	1,327	1,660	5,537
Meath	421	199	253	873
Monaghan	575	145	341	1,061
Offaly	475	277	296	1,048
Roscommon	1,519	551	717	2,787
Sligo	938	362	493	1,793
Tipperary	1,129	507	507	2,143
Waterford	361	131	122	614
Westmeath	643	263	281	1,187
Wexford	758	264	304	1,326
Wicklow	331	151	203	685
TOTAL	25,225	11,231	13,278	49,734

Fur Farming

132. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to adopt a similar strategy to Norway in order to close Ireland's three licenced mink fur farms in view of the fact that the Norwegian authorities have recently announced a strategy to close down that country's 300 fur farms by 2023. [3630/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No. 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Irish fur farmers are, in this regard, subject to the same animal welfare legislation as other livestock farmers.

A review of all aspects of fur farming in Ireland was commissioned in November 2011. The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming;
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector;
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on licence holders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by Department officials.

In the circumstances, given with recommendations from the review group, I have no plans to amend the current provisions in this area.

Departmental Reports

133. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the implementation of each of the 40 actions in the mobile phone and broadband taskforce report. [3545/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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. The Implementation Group I co-chair with Minister Kyne is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This includes ComReg, who attend as both an action owner, and in an observer capacity in their role as the independent Regulator.

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. This Report will give an update on progress made on each of the 40 actions and will evidence the continuing progress, together with 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.

The Taskforce's achievements to date include:

- Funding of all local authorities to assign a Broadband Officer;
- Close cooperation with local authorities to develop local digital strategies, including Government working closely with local authorities to identify approximately 320 high speed Stra-

tegic Community Access Hubs to be connected at an early juncture after award of the NBP contract;

- ComReg's development of a testing regime to check mobile handset performance which will inform consumers in choosing products and network services. ComReg will also develop a new network coverage map.

- Most local authorities applying waivers in respect of development contributions for telecoms development.

- Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has constructed 80km of ducting on the M7/M8 corridor and 14km on the N25 in Cork, with more following in the coming months to help expedite infrastructure roll-out. TII is also reviewing the cost of duct access for telecoms.

All of these initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of telecommunications services, particularly in rural areas.

Commission for Communications Regulation Staff

134. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that the communications regulator has the necessary financial resources and personnel to be able to fully carry out the responsibilities it has under its remit. [3548/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The funding of the Communications Regulator is an operational matter and not one in which I as Minister have any function. Funding is provided through fees and levies on the communications and postal sectors made by the Communications Regulator under section 30 of the Communications Regulation Act, 2002.

The appropriate level of staffing of the Communications Regulator is one of my functions as Minister under section 20 of the Communications Regulation Act, 2002. As consultation on staff resourcing is currently on going between the Communications Regulator and officials of my Department, I cannot comment on the detail at this time.

Warmer Homes Scheme

135. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are plans to extend to the warmth and wellbeing scheme to other counties, including County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3557/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Warmth and Wellbeing scheme is a pilot initiative being delivered under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. Its main aim is to demonstrate the positive effects that making homes warmer and more energy efficient can have on the health and wellbeing of people in energy poverty who are living with a chronic respiratory condition. The Warmth and Wellbeing scheme is a joint policy initiative between my Department and the Department of Health. The pilot began in 2016 and has now entered the final year of its 3 year operational period. I have allocated €20m to the pilot scheme under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) are working together to deliver the scheme.

As it is a pilot scheme, the resources available to the scheme are limited and consequently I have had to limit eligibility for the scheme. The operational area for the scheme was selected as Community Health Area (CHO) 7, following consultation with the Department of Health and the HSE. This CHO encompasses Kildare/West Wicklow, Dublin West, Dublin South City and Dublin South West. Within CHO 7 the need to build capacity in the local public health and SEAI teams, and establish communications on the pilot with the local community, meant that further narrowing of the area was necessary and Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24 were selected as the operational areas.

An independent research project will assess the impact the scheme is having. At the conclusion of the scheme, and with independent evidence on its effectiveness, the potential for a wider rollout, including any criteria, will be considered

Gas Networks Ireland

136. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps taken to ensure that the supply of natural gas is available more widely throughout the midlands, particularly in the context of counties Westmeath and Longford in which significant towns and villages have been deprived of same due to the narrow criteria being utilised in the assessment of the requirement of these towns and villages for the supply to be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3635/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As I have stated in reply to previous Questions on this issue, I have no statutory function, as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in relation to either the routing of gas pipelines or the connection of towns to the gas pipeline network. These are matters for Gas Networks Ireland, a commercial State-sponsored body under the aegis of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, the statutorily independent Regulator.

I have, however, also stated that, in my view, the possibility of whether network extensions should, where economically feasible and in line with our energy policy goals in the White Paper, provide for future connections in order to contribute to regional and rural development, needs to be addressed. My long-standing position on the gas network is that it should be developed generally in rural Ireland to provide natural gas to as many areas as possible. Accordingly, I commissioned a study last year on the wider costs and benefits of gas network extensions, to include possible climate and decarbonisation aspects, as well as regional and rural development benefits. My Department appointed external consultants to undertake this work last October and a seminar on the matter was held on 15 January. The study will be completed by the end of February and I will consider the findings at that stage.

Tourism Policy

137. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated and the sources for the development of the midlands tourism brand. [3499/18]

138. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether there is adequate provision of human resources for the roll-out the midlands tourism brand. [3500/18]

139. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the

roll-out of the midlands tourism brand will be finished. [3501/18]

140. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the counties that will be included in the new midlands tourism brand. [3502/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 to 140, inclusive, together.

My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the development, implementation or management of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. Similarly, I do not have a direct role in relation to the development, implementation or management of branding strategies.

I can inform the Deputy that an initial capital investment of €1m was secured in Budget 2018 to allow Fáilte Ireland to progress its preparatory work on creating a distinctive tourism brand for the Midlands during 2018. Additional current funding of approximately €1.9m has also been provided to Fáilte Ireland in 2018 for Brexit related activities and the development of the midlands brand. The breakdown of this funding is a matter for Fáilte Ireland.

The other matters raised by the Deputy are operational matters for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I am referring the Deputy's questions to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Light Rail Projects Provision

141. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role his Department has in the requisition of longer trams on the LUAS green line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3515/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and in the context of Light Rail works with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) to deliver the Luas Network.

Passenger numbers on both lines of the Luas network increased by over 10% to 37.6 million in 2017. With the Green Line now extended to Broombridge, and providing interchange with the Red Line and greater connectivity to rail services, those numbers are likely to grow substantially again in 2018. While it is welcomed that so many new customers are using the extended Green Line, it has meant that some trams are operating at capacity.

As part of the Luas Cross City project seven new 55 metre-long trams have been ordered by TII to increase capacity on the Green Line. The first of these new trams is expected to be in service next month and the remainder will be delivered and become operational over the next few months.

In addition, 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 is proposed in the National Transport Authority's (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035.

The project, being managed by TII and NTA, will cost approximately €90 million and it includes the lengthening of the 26 existing Green line trams from 43 metres to 55 metres and the purchase of a further 8 new 55 metre-long trams which will greatly increase the passenger capacity of the fleet now and to meet future passenger demand. 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 project also includes modifications to Sandyford Depot to accommodate the maintenance of the longer trams. Construction work has already begun at the depot and the order for the tram extensions was placed in November last year.

Additionally the Green Line Infrastructure Upgrade, an investment project to lengthen the platforms at the Green Line stations was also completed by TII towards the end of last year.

Taxi Licences

142. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of taxi drivers that have had their licences withdrawn in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3528/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the licensing of vehicles within this sector, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Motor Tax

143. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the back money must be paid to put a vehicle on the road again in circumstances in which a vehicle has been off the road for a period of time and the Motor Tax Office was not informed of this at the time (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3538/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Non-Use of Motor Vehicles Act 2013 came into effect on 1 July 2013. The primary purpose of the Act is to replace the system whereby a vehicle was declared off the road retrospectively, which was unverifiable, with a system under which the vehicle must be declared off the road in advance.

The Act provides that a vehicle can be declared off the road for a minimum period of three months and a maximum period of twelve months. Where the owner of a vehicle wishes to make a declaration of non-use, he or she must do so during the final month of an existing tax disc or a previously made declaration of non-use. The declaration can be made on-line at www.motortax.ie or through the local motor tax office. The Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division of my Department issues renewal notices at the beginning of the final month of tax or a previously made declaration of non-use to remind motorists that the vehicle must be either taxed or declared off the road for a further period.

Where a declaration of non-use is not made in the final month of a tax disc or previously made declaration of non-use, a vehicle must be taxed for the minimum period provided for in motor tax legislation for the category of vehicle concerned. A new declaration can then be

made at any stage during the final month of the new motor tax disc if the vehicle is thereafter not going to be in use in a public place.

These arrangements were well publicised at the time of introduction of the legislation.

Light Rail Projects Status

144. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the metro north project; when it is expected the final plan will be published; the level of funding allocated; when it is expected construction work will commence and be completed respectively; and when it is expected passenger services will begin. [3569/18]

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

Funding of over €700 million has been allocated under the Government's present Capital Plan 2016-2021 for planning, design and construction of Metro North with construction work commencing in 2021 and passenger services starting in 2027. The estimated cost of completing the Metro North project is €2.4 billion.

The NTA, in collaboration with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), is undertaking an option analysis and selection study of possible metro alignments and station locations. It is my understanding that the NTA and TII expect that this process will be completed shortly, after which a public consultation process will be undertaken on the Emerging Preferred Route (EPR). Arising from this work a final route and station location will be established. It is also expected that Preliminary Design will commence early this year.

The 10 year capital plan which will be published shortly will provide a funding commitment to complete this significant addition to public transport.

Bus Services

145. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the National Transport Authority to address concerns regarding changes to the 109 bus route from Cavan to Dublin which is causing undue stress to commuters, particularly those attending the Mater hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3607/18]

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

Greenways Provision

146. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the provision of the section of the Royal Canal greenway in particular in the vicinity of the new LUAS stop at Broombridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3611/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) including the allocation of funding for the building of specific cycling infrastructure projects. Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply with regard to this particular project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Child and Family Agency

147. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all work rotas issued by Tusla are compliant with the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3559/18]

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

Child and Family Agency Data

148. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of residential care units under the direction of Tusla, including residential care units brought under the direction of Tusla on its formation in each of the years from 2005 to 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3560/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have received this information.

Preschool Services

149. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the budget allocated to the access and inclusion model of early education and childcare provision under each of the levels four to seven of this scheme for 2017; the amounts drawn down for 2017 in respect of each of the four levels, in tabular form; the number of children in each county that have benefitted from funding under each of these four levels in 2017; the areas of support in which this funding under each of the four headings have been applied; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3540/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): AIM supports children with disabilities to reap the full benefits of free pre-school education. Its goal is to support pre-school providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience. AIM is a child-centred and evidence-based model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs and strengths of the child and the pre-school setting. Where a pre-school provider, in conjunction with a parent, considers that some additional support is needed in order to meet the needs of a child with a disability in an inclusive way, an application can be made for a suite of targeted supports, namely:

Level 4: Expert Early Years Educational Advice and Support

This level provides access to mentoring for pre-school practitioners from a team of dedicated Early Years Specialists. To avail of this support, pre-school providers and parents are requested to complete an online Access and Inclusion Profile. This looks at the strengths, abilities and needs of the child, as well as the strengths and needs of the pre-school setting.

Level 5: Equipment, Appliances and Minor Alterations Capital Grants

This level provides for access to specialised equipment, appliances, assistive technology and/or minor alterations capital grants for pre-school settings to ensure children with a disability can participate in the ECCE programme. A short report from a designated professional is required confirming that the specialised equipment or minor building alterations are necessary.

Level 6: Therapeutic Intervention

This level provides access to therapeutic services where they are critical to enable the child to be enrolled and to fully participate in the ECCE Programme. To avail of this support, pre-school providers and parents are requested to complete the online Access and Inclusion Profile. The Early Years Specialist will review the profile and, where therapeutic input is likely to be required; the Specialist will initiate contact with the HSE. The HSE decides on the appropriate level of therapeutic intervention.

Level 7: Additional Assistance in the Pre-School Room

This level provides additional assistance in the pre-school room where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation in the ECCE Programme. It is estimated that pre-school providers may need Level 7 in the case of approximately 1% to 1.5% of all children. In line with emerging best practice to support the integration and independence of children with a disability, AIM does not fund Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). Rather, it provides financial support to the pre-school provider, which can be used either to reduce the adult to child ratio in the pre-school room or to buy in additional assistance to the pre-school room. Accordingly, Level 7 assistance is a shared resource for the pre-school setting.

AIM was launched in June 2016. The total funding allocated and outturn in 2017 to levels 4, 5 and 7 of AIM by my Department is set out below. Funding for AIM Level 6 comes from the Department of Health Vote.

The Inter-Department Group, which developed AIM recognised that it would take approximately three years to fully develop and implement the Model. It is expected that demand for all levels of support under AIM will increase in years 2 and 3 and the budget available for AIM makes provision for this.

Level	Element of Model	2017 Allocation (m*)	2017 Outturn (m*)
4	Expert Early Years Educational Advice and Support	10.1	4.417
5	Equipment, Appliances and Minor Alterations Grants and application process	2.5	2.967
6	Therapeutic Intervention	-	-
7	Additional Assistance in the Pre-School Room and Application Process	14.1	8.202

*Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

The number of children in each county who have benefitted from supports under AIM Levels 4, 5 and 7 in 2016 and 2017 is shown in the tables below. It should be noted that these figures relate to separate ECCE programme years (i.e. 2016/17 and 2017/18). Therefore, they may include double-counting of some children who were supported in both ECCE programme years.

Number of Children receiving AIM support in the ECCE Programme 2016/17 over the period January 2017 - June 2017

County	Level 4	Level 5 Equipment	Level 5 Alterations	Level 7
Carlow	24	1		15
Cavan	35	4	1	30
Clare	77	6	3	59
Cork	265	29	7	210
Donegal	72	5	3	56
Dublin	371	18	1	263
Galway	79	3	0	66
Kerry	51	2	1	40
Kildare	68	11	1	48
Kilkenny	25	3	1	19
Laois	43	10	1	30
Leitrim	15	0	1	9
Limerick	106	7	1	84
Longford	23			11
Louth	52	6		40
Mayo	57	3		44
Meath	77	14	3	57
Monaghan	23	2	0	21
Offaly	31	2		26
Roscommon	34	2	1	16
Sligo	19	6	1	13
Tipperary	68	5	2	48
Waterford	27	3	1	24
Westmeath	23	1		18
Wexford	60	1	2	51
Wicklow	44	4		33
Total	1,769	148	31	1,331

Number of Children receiving AIM support in the ECCE Programme 2017/18 over the period September 2017 - December 2017

County	Level 4	Level 5 Equipment	Level 5 Alterations	Level 7
Carlow	20	2		8
Cavan	18	3		10
Clare	24	2		9
Cork	152	18	0	65
Donegal	54	7	1	10
Dublin	289	10		97
Galway	65	5		27
Kerry	54	4		15
Kildare	59	4		31
Kilkenny	24	2		16
Laois	34	0	1	11
Leitrim	8	2	1	2
Limerick	48	8		25

County	Level 4	Level 5 Equipment	Level 5 Alterations	Level 7
Longford	6			1
Louth	44	0		14
Mayo	42	4		13
Meath	67	4	1	21
Monaghan	6	1		1
Offaly	30	2	1	19
Roscommon	16		0	4
Sligo	6	3		2
Tipperary	46	8		18
Waterford	28			6
Westmeath	23			5
Wexford	50	1		23
Wicklow	31	1		14
Total	1,244	91	5	467

Child and Family Agency Funding

150. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the possible closure of a service (details supplied); if so, the plans that have been put in place to streamline the service and to ensure that the service continues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3555/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Time4Us is a Play Centre for family members who wish to spend time with children that they do not live with. This can be parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, siblings or other family members.

Time4Us Ltd is a Registered Company, limited by guarantee. The service initially opened on the east side of Galway city and later moved to a HSE/Tusla owned property on Shantalla Road on the west side of Galway City.

The main source of referrals is from the courts and solicitors in private family law cases. Referrals are also received from parents, mediation services and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Of the current 41 open cases the referral origin is as follows:

Referral origin	Total
Court ordered for non-supervised access	25
Solicitor referrals	4
Self-referrals	7
Tusla referrals	5

Time4Us in the past received funding from the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Justice. Funding ceased as a result of austerity measures and this led to a shortfall of approximately €30,000. For the past three years the St. Vincent de Paul in Galway, through the Maureen O'Connell fund, provided €30,000 to bridge the gap but this funding has now ceased.

Tusla, has informed me that the Board of Time4Us has decided to cease the service on 31st March 2018.

I understand that Tusla are working with the Board of Time4Us to identify any alternative supports, within Tusla's area of responsibility, that may be available to families in their local area.

Departmental Funding

151. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to lower funding or decrease staffing, including community employment schemes, to projects funded by her Department at a facility (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3565/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities.

These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme, amounting to €10.65m in 2017, under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. This funding is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people.

Scouting Ireland receives grant aid on an annual basis under the Youth Service Grant Scheme. In 2017, €876,337 was allocated to the organisation under the Scheme, a 5% increase over the 2016 allocation.

Budget 2018 provided an additional €1.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services, bringing the total allocation to €58.9m. This additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people. My Department has commenced a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2018 and to finalise the 2018 allocations. Organisations, including Scouting Ireland, will be advised of their 2018 allocation as soon as possible. It is not envisaged at this point that there will be any reduction in the 2018 Youth Service Grant Scheme grant scheme allocation to Scouting Ireland.

Over the past few years, Scouting Ireland has received significant other funding through my Department, outside of the Youth Service Grant Scheme. The organisation was allocated €150,000 in current funding in 2015 and a further €200,000 in Dormant Accounts funding in 2016 to support the Operation Lelievlet youth employment initiative. It received €49,630 under the Youth Capital Funding Scheme 2016 / 2017 to fund capital works. In 2015 €30,000 was also provided to the organisation to assist it with its budget sustainability to the year end.

In addition to the grant funding above, additional funding is being provided to Scouting Ireland for its AcadaMoot Programme. Up to €200,000 will be made available to the organisation over a five year period in this regard.

I was pleased to approve the establishment the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017. The primary focus of this scheme was to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme allowed for the purchase of equipment for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items. Some €6.35m has been made available nationally. I am advised that scouting groups across Ireland received in excess of €1.5m under the scheme in late 2017.

Child and Family Agency Data

152. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children on care orders; and the types of care orders, in tabular form. [3575/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has informed me that the latest data available on the reason for a child being in care relates to Quarter 4, 2016. The 2017 data is currently being compiled at area level and will be collated and verified at national level later in the year.

The table below relates to the number of children in care on 31st December 2016 and the legal reason for them being in care.

Types of Care orders	Nos.	Percentages
Voluntary	2,026	32%
Another Care Order (e.g. Section 12)	8	0.1%
Special Care Order of the High Court	12	0.2%
Care Order	3,508	56%
Interim Care Order	606	10%
Emergency Care Order	107	2%
No. of Children in Care	6,267	

Children in Care

153. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children on voluntary care orders; and the length of time these children have spent on voluntary care orders, in tabular form. [3576/18]

154. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that have spent more than one, three, five and eight years respectively on voluntary care orders, in tabular form. [3577/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 and 154 together.

Under Section 4 of the Child Care Act, 1991, the means by which a child can be received into voluntary care by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is set out. This section of the Act allows Tusla to receive a child into care without a court order and with the consent of the child's parents, when this is required for the child's welfare or protection.

Data about the length of time children spend on voluntary care orders is not collated in the manner requested by the Deputy.

Tusla have advised me that the most recent available data refers to Quarter Four 2016, which indicates that there were 6,267 children in care, and 2,026 of these children were in voluntary care.

The table displays data which is returned annually in relation to the overall number of children in care and the length of time in care broken down by three time bands

Time spent	No.	Percentage
Length of time in Care less than 1 year	704	11.2%

Time spent	No.	Percentage
Length of time in Care 1-5 years	2,716	43.3%
Length of time in Care greater than 5 years	2,847	45.4%
No. Children in Care	6,267	

Child and Family Agency Data

155. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in foster care, residential care, relative foster care and other care placements, in tabular form; and the number of these children with an allocated social worker. [3578/18]

156. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of child protection referrals made to Tusla in 2017. [3579/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 and 156 together.

Data on child welfare and protection referrals is reported by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, quarterly in arrears. At the end of Q2 2017 there had been 27,892 referrals to Child Protection and Welfare Services. Provisional figures indicate that there have been an approximately 12,700 referrals in Q3, 2017. On the basis of this trend, a full year figure should exceed 50,000 referrals to Tusla.

Based on the breakdown of type of referral in previous years, it is anticipated that approximately 40% of these referrals will relate to child welfare concerns, and 60%, approximately, will be for child protection concerns.

I am providing a Table showing the number of children in care by care type, and the number of these with an allocated social worker. The Table is based on the latest data available, up to the last day of October 2017.

Care Type	Total	Number with an allocated social worker	Percentage with an allocated social worker
Residential General Care	346	342	99%
Residential Special Care	11	11	100%
Foster Care (General)	4,061	3,925	97%
Foster Care (Relative)	1,659	1,567	94%
“Other” Care Placement	129	128	99%
Total	6,206	5,973	96%

Child and Family Agency

157. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether Tusla has adequate resources to deal with the expected increase in workload due to the new regulations requiring the mandatory reporting of child protection concerns. [3580/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have secured an additional €40 million for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, in 2018. This is the third year in succession that Tusla has received a significant increase in its funding, which now amounts to over €753m.

I strongly support the work of Tusla, and I am committed to supporting the Agency in meeting the growing needs of children and families.

The additional resources secured for Tusla in 2018 will assist in meeting key priorities. The additional investment will allow Tusla to recruit a range of additional staff to respond to areas of identified risk, and to meet increased demand for services, including an anticipated increase in referrals following the introduction of mandatory reporting. This increase in funding is also enabling the further management of unallocated cases. Tusla is also in the process of recruiting more administrative staff to support social workers in their child protection duties.

In 2018, funding is also being used to establish a single national out-of-hours social work service, building on significant progress made in recent years in strengthening this service, enhanced collaboration with An Garda Síochána, additional on-call social work capacity and a new out-of-hours support service for foster carers.

I have requested that Tusla develop a robust workforce plan which addresses succession planning, retention, career pathways, training and development, future workforce needs, priority gaps and a strategy for tackling the priority gaps, dealing with a rise in referrals due to mandatory reporting and reducing unallocated cases.

In conclusion, I am confident that the Exchequer funding of over €753m in 2018 provides Tusla with significantly increased capacity to respond to areas of identified risk and anticipated demand, including the introduction of mandated reporting, and to progress a number of key service developments which will ensure better outcomes for vulnerable children, and families, who need our services and support.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

158. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process undertaken by her Department to advertise outside of the State for witnesses to come forward to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3581/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The statutory Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) is independent in the conduct of its investigations. Therefore the advertising strategy is a matter for the Commission to decide and I do not have any role or influence in this regard.

The Commission previously informed me that it had written to a range of Irish groups in the UK and the USA inviting relevant people to come forward to provide testimony and information, and the Confidential Committee has visited the UK on a number of occasions.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the range of concerns relating to Mother and Baby Homes, and the establishment of the Commission of Investigation, continues to be widely reported by national and international media outlets.

While I do not have a direct role the Commission's advertising strategies, I am on record of this House as encouraging any person with information which may be relevant to the Commission to contact the investigation team directly. All relevant contact information is on my Department's website and can be accessed at www.dcy.gov.ie.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

159. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has met with a group (details supplied); and her plans to meet the group regarding the expert technical report on Tuam. [3582/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have met members of the group referred to by the Deputy and with other former residents of the Tuam mother and baby home during my visits to Tuam and in other fora.

With regard to the Expert Technical Group Report on the Tuam site, I published this Report to give us a fuller understanding of the available options in responding to the confirmation of human remains interred at this site, and to ensure that the outcomes which might be realistic and attainable in respect of each course of action could be understood by the public.

I am conscious that this is a very sensitive and difficult matter for many former residents, their families and those living in the vicinity of the site. Therefore, I want to ensure that everyone who wishes to contribute to the deliberations on what action should be taken has an equal opportunity to do so. Galway County Council is making arrangements to facilitate a structured consultation to determine the views of interested parties and I do not wish to interfere in any way with this process.

I am advised that the Council plans to announce further details of the consultation process shortly. In the interim, the council has set up a dedicated telephone line (Tel: 091-509561) and e-mail address (TuamConsultation@galwaycoco.ie) for persons who may wish to contact the Council in relation to these matters.

An Inter-Departmental Group, led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, will provide an oversight role for the whole of Government in terms of strategy and overall approach for the project. The results of the consultation process will be reported back to the Inter-Departmental Group in March. The Group will then assist me in preparing a proposal for the future of the site which I will bring to Government for its consideration.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

160. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to failures by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes to correspond or reply to survivors living abroad that had contacted the Commission. [3583/18]

162. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason persons that have testified to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes have not been permitted access to that testimony along with their own personal records. [3586/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 and 162 together.

The statutory Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) is independent in the conduct of its investigations. I do not have any role or influence in how the Commission engages with witnesses in the course of its investigations.

I am advised that the Commission's policy is to keep all the evidence provided to it in secure storage on its premises. Individuals who have met the Confidential Committee may come to the Commission's premises and hear the recording of their evidence and/or read the notes on their case if these have been written up. Individuals who give evidence to the full Commission may

similarly read the transcript of their evidence on the Commission's premises. If individuals provide personal records to the Commission, it is the policy to photocopy these and return the originals to the people concerned on the day. The Commission does not have any role in assisting individuals in resolving questions on their identity or in tracing birth relatives. Persons seeking such information should contact the Information and Tracing services of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency (www.tusla.ie) or the Adoption Authority of Ireland (www.aai.gov.ie).

The Commission's policy is to reply to all correspondence whether from Ireland or abroad. I know that the Commission would welcome being contacted again if it has inadvertently failed to reply to any individual. If the Deputy is aware of any specific cases she may wish to advise the person involved to contact the Commission directly in relation to these matters.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

161. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there has been progress on her proposal to examine a transitional justice approach to deal with the legacy of mother and baby homes. [3585/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It is important to note that the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes is a vital step on the path we have commenced to achieve a holistic truth. The Commission is continuing to do the valuable work it was established to do.

In parallel to the Commission's work, it is my wish to adopt a transitional justice approach through developing measures to support and empower former residents of these institutions and their families. I am progressing a number of initiatives in this regard to facilitate an appropriate way forward in our response to what are hugely complex and sensitive matters.

In June and October of last year two facilitated meetings were held with former residents of Mother and Baby Homes. A key ask that emerged from these meetings was that of "nothing about us without us". My recent announcement of the establishment of a Collaborative Forum for former residents is a direct response to this wish by former residents.

The Forum will enable former residents to identify, discuss and prioritise the issues of concern to them, and facilitate them to make recommendations for actions and solutions. I published a Charter for the Collaborative Forum which describes its structure, scope and working methodology.

The Forum will examine specific themes on a modular basis to facilitate it in making recommendations to me. The Forum will explore a wide number of practical issues including: issues dealing with respectful and inclusive terminology and language; strategies to undo stigma and raise public awareness; identifying and sharing good practice in peer to peer support activities; access to professional counselling services and other specific health and personal social services; memorialisation which acknowledges and recognise past events; and documenting and presenting personal narratives of former residents and their relatives to ensure an archive of material is created and preserved. I will be making an announcement with further details on this Forum shortly.

In addition, the Government has agreed to invite Mr. Pablo de Greiff, UN Special Rapporteur, to assist Ireland in our response to issues related to former Mother and Baby homes and I am working with my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to arrange this invitation.

Improving communication with former residents continues to be a priority of mine as I believe that open and consistent communication on the matters of concern is essential while the Commission continues with the work that it was established to do. My Department has increased its focus on communication by establishing an e-zine update which is posted on the Mother and Babies Homes section of my Department's website on the first Friday of every month. In this way everyone has access to the same information at the same time.

My department has also established a dedicated phone line and email address to facilitate direct communications with my Department by interested parties.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 160.

Community Services Programme

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3542/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Around 425 organisations are supported under the CSP, with funding provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions. The CSP contribution must be co-funded by the organisation concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services. General administration costs are met from this locally generated income.

The organisation in question has been supported by the CSP since 2006 with a funding contribution towards the cost of a manager and three full-time equivalent posts. However, it has now voluntarily exited the Programme and, in this context, I understand that the organisation will not be required by Pobal to submit audited statements.

Pension Provisions

164. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to concerns in respect of pensions provisions that the minimum funding standards are inappropriate; if there has been an examination of this issue; her plans to review the legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3654/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Pensions legislation provides for the supervision and regulation of occupational pension schemes and, in that context, requires defined benefit schemes to meet the commitments they have made to their members. This method by which this is regulated is set out in the Funding Standard.

The Funding Standard provides a benchmark against which the 'health' of a scheme can be tested. A scheme failing the Funding Standard means that, unless some action is taken, the scheme will not be able to pay the benefits promised. The existence of the Funding Standard itself is not the central issue in relation to whether a scheme is properly funded. Rather the responsibility rests with the employer and the trustees for ensuring that the scheme is properly funded and managed. However, the Funding Standard does provide the regulatory mechanism for ensuring that a scheme can provide a level of the pension benefits promised.

The funding standard is a wind-up standard, and is intended to approximate the monies

needed to secure the benefits if the scheme was wound up and the accrued benefits bought out.

The Pensions Authority is the independent body responsible for regulating the funding standard. If a scheme does not meet the funding standard, a funding proposal must be submitted to the Authority in accordance with the time limits detailed in the Pensions Act.

The Pensions Authority requires that, in setting investment policy, the trustees of a DB scheme must have regard to the need to satisfy at regular intervals the minimum funding standard set down in the Pensions Act. However a number of steps have been taken to reduce the risks to pension scheme members caused by market volatility.

In order to provide increased investment options for pension schemes the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2010 and 2011 introduced the option for trustees to purchase sovereign annuities. Pension schemes that purchase sovereign annuities or the underlying bonds benefit from a reduction in their liabilities under the funding standard. Buying sovereign annuities for the pensioners has the effect of reducing pensioner liabilities under the funding standard and provides additional funds for the other members of the scheme.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012 requires a DB scheme to hold additional funding in the form of a 'risk reserve' by 2023. This function of this 'risk reserve' is to provide some protection and long term stability for scheme members against future volatility in financial markets. Additionally, and in appropriate circumstances, the regulator may now approve scheme funding proposals that provide for the recovery of their schemes funding over longer periods that was previously the case.

It should be noted that the Irish funding standard is less demanding in comparison to almost all other European countries. I believe that the minimum funding standard is appropriate and my Department, in conjunction with the Pensions Authority, monitors the operation of the minimum funding standard for DB pension schemes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

165. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for carer's benefit by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3503/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's benefit was received from the person concerned on 12 December 2017.

The application was awarded to the person concerned with effect from 22 February 2018 from when her carer's leave commences. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 22 February 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 12 January 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

166. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the Citizens Information Board to be categorised as a charity and to have a charitable status; her views on whether the board's status as a charity may be in breach of the Charities Act 2009; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3512/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) under the aegis of my Department is responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money advice and budgeting) and advocacy on a wide range of public and social services. The Citizens Information Board delivers on this remit through direct provision, by supporting a network of delivery partners, and by funding targeted projects.

CIB meets the registration requirements of the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) to be granted charitable status. It operates for charitable purposes and is of public benefit.

The Charities Regulator, the Charities Regulatory Authority, was established on 16 October 2014 pursuant to the Charities Act 2009. The general function of the regulator is to regulate charitable organisations operating in Ireland in order to increase public trust and confidence in their management and administration.

Part 4 of the Charities Act 2009 confers investigative and enforcement powers on the Charities Regulator, complementing its regulatory powers under Part 3 of the Act. Any person who has concerns that a charitable organisation is in breach of the Charities Act 2009, should forward details of his or her concerns to the Charities Regulator. All concerns expressed to the regulator are actively reviewed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Legislative Programme

167. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 will be on the Dáil Éireann Order Paper for Second Stage reading; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3514/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I hope to have the Bill taken at Second Stage on the week commencing the 13th February, subject to the agreement of the House Business Committee.

The Bill is an important piece of legislation with a particular focus on low-paid and precariously employed workers. The key objective of the Bill is to improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and those working variable hours. I am looking forward to working with colleagues on all sides of the House to progress this Bill as expeditiously as possible.

Departmental Reports

168. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the report into bogus self employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3522/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The classification of a worker for PRSI purposes is increasingly complicated by 'disguised –em-

ployment', such as intermediary employment structures and certain self-employment arrangements. These mechanisms can be used to reduce the amount of PRSI and tax being paid, with a subsequent loss to the exchequer and the social insurance fund.

An interdepartmental working group, comprising officials from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners, has completed a report on this matter. The working group sought the views of interested parties and stakeholders through a public consultation with interested parties, including employers, trade unions, professional bodies and individuals. I am considering the report with my colleague, the Minister for Finance, with a view to its publication shortly.

My Department's Scope insurability section determines the employment status and the correct class of social insurance for workers. Where misclassification of workers as self-employed is detected, the correct status and class is determined and social insurance arrears are collected as required. Any worker who has concerns about their social insurance status should contact the Scope insurability section.

Paternity Benefit

169. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that received statutory paternity benefit in 2017. [3525/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Paternity benefit provides a payment in respect of two weeks paternity leave to be taken within 26 weeks of the birth of the baby. During the 2017 year, 26,139 people availed of this leave and were awarded paternity benefit.

Citizen Information Services

170. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the Citizens Information service can take over the running of a service (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3535/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) under the aegis of my Department is responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money advice and budgeting) and advocacy on a wide range of public and social services. The Citizens Information Board delivers on this remit through direct provision, by supporting a network of delivery partners, and by funding targeted projects.

I am informed by CIB that the information service operating in Edenmore Shopping Centre is provided by an organisation linked to Northside Partnership Ltd.

Northside Partnership Ltd has approached the Citizens Information Board to discuss the provision of an outreach information service in Edenmore, when that service ceases operation.

Following discussion with the two Citizens Information Services (CIS) in proximity to the Edenmore area (North Bay and Northside CIS), CIB has confirmed that each of those services have agreed to provide an outreach information service at Edenmore two mornings per week, which will result in a service being available four mornings per week in Edenmore.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

171. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reverse the 2012 changes to the State pension (contributory); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3551/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On the 23rd January, the Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated by a new “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) which will include up to 20 years of a new HomeCaring credit. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. It will make it easier for pensioners assessed under the yearly average model, to qualify for a higher rate of the State Pension (contributory). The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person’s social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines a final pension outcome.

The new TCA with substantial HomeCaring credits will be available to all people who reached pension age after 1st September 2012, when the revised rate bands took effect.

Under the new arrangements a person who has a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of the new HomeCaring credits, will qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme.

The new TCA for pensioners assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, comes into effect from the 30th March 2018. The Department will invite over 40,000 pensioners, currently assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, to have their pensions recalculated under TCA to determine if they qualify for a higher rate of entitlement. However, as it will take time to design and set up administrative processes, and the necessary IT systems, the Department expects to send out the invitations from Q4 2018 and to begin payments, including arrears for any period from 30th March 2018, from Q1 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

172. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person that completes a 52 week programme for jobpath that has failed to find employment can be referred back to the jobpath programme for a further 52 weeks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3552/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): All Jobseekers on the live register must be capable of available for and actively seeking full time employment, they are also required to engage with the Department’s activation services. The Social Welfare (Consolidated) Act 2005, as amended, specifies that participation in activation meetings is mandatory.

JobPath is provided for long term unemployed jobseekers only and those referred are chosen by means of a random selection process. Protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks on the JobPath programme within the previous four months.

If, at the end of this four month period the jobseeker is not engaged with one of the other activation supports and services, they then become eligible for selection for a second referral to the JobPath service.

Jobseekers who are referred for a second time will have already achieved progress during their previous engagement, their personal advisor will assist them to agree a new personal progression plan which will build further on that progress with the aim of moving from jobseeker's support to sustainable employment.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

173. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person that had been placed under sanction for non-compliance with the Jobpath programme can be served with consecutive sanctions; if a person under sanction can be immediately sanctioned after serving a previous sanction; if not, if there is an appeal process or sanction notice that must be issued first; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3554/18]

174. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will publish the policy and guidelines for the issuing of sanctions regarding jobpath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3562/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 and 174 together.

Penalty Rates are a legal provision within the Jobseeker schemes to ensure that the Department can achieve compliance with Government Activation Policy as stated in Pathways to Work. Activation measures include the requirement to attend group or individual meetings, and/or avail of suitable education, training or development opportunities, or specified employment programmes, which are considered appropriate to a person's circumstances.

Legislation provides that sanctions/penalties in the form of reduced payments may be imposed by a Deciding Officer where recipients of jobseeker payments fail, without good cause, to comply with activation measures. Reduced rates are only applied where a jobseeker fails to engage as requested, and following at least two warnings, with the Department's employment services.

Instructions in the application of penalty rates state that after a minimum of 21 calendar days (3 weeks) on a Penalty Rate, where the client continues to refuse, without good cause, to attend after further notice has been given, the activation 9-week disqualification from Jobseeker's Benefit/Allowance will be applied.

Where an activation 9-week disqualification has been applied, and the client continues to fail to engage, without good cause, in the activation process, the question as to whether the person satisfies the basic conditions for entitlement to JA or JB arises, and their Jobseeker claim may be reviewed. During the 9 weeks, the disqualification may be lifted at any time if the person engages in the activation process.

If at the end of the 9-week disqualification period the client continues to fail to re-engage, the Penalty Rate must be reapplied for a further 21 calendar days (3 weeks) before a further 9-week disqualification can be applied. In all circumstances, advance written notice must be given. Legislation does not allow for any one period of disqualification to exceed 9 weeks or

consecutive 9-week disqualifications.

The Jobseeker can appeal the Deciding Officer's decision for reduced rate penalties and for a 9 week disqualification, through the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

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 the Department then contact the Jobseeker and seek to arrange a meeting to discuss the matter directly with them. The application of penalty rates for all clients is entirely a matter for the Department and officials involved will take all relevant factors into account.

Pensions Reform

175. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reform the pension system which it is perceived 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. [3608/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On the 23rd January, the Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated by a new "Total Contributions Approach" (TCA) which will include up to 20 years of a new HomeCaring credit. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. It will make it easier for pensioners assessed under the yearly average model, to qualify for a higher rate of the State Pension (contributory). The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person's social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines a final pension outcome.

The new TCA with substantial HomeCaring credits will be available to all people who reached pension age after 1st September 2012, when the revised rate bands took effect.

Under the new arrangements a person who has a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of the new HomeCaring credits, will qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme.

The new TCA for pensioners assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, comes into effect from the 30th March 2018. The Department will invite over 40,000 pensioners, currently assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, to have their pensions recalculated under TCA to determine if they qualify for a higher rate of entitlement. However, as it will take time to design and set up administrative processes, and the necessary IT systems, the Department expects to send out the invitations from Q4 2018 and to begin payments, including arrears for any period from 30th March 2018, from Q1 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

176. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer's application will be considered in relation to a person (details supplied) in need of full time care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3633/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 24 July 2017. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and it was decided that it did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied. The person concerned was notified on 24 October 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support.

The outcome of this review is that the application was awarded to the person concerned on 22 January 2018, with effect from 27 July 2017, and the first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 1 February 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from 27 July 2017 to 31 January 2018 will also issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 22 January 2018 of this revised decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

177. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3637/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 29 November 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Pressure Zones

178. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when Navan, Trim, Athboy, Enfield, Oldcastle, Castlepollard and Delvin will become eligible to qualify as rent pressure zones. [3533/18]

181. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will direct the Residential Tenancies Board to extend the rent pressure zone to all of County Louth in view of the rent increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[3567/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 and 181 together.

Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 sets out the procedure for the Minister to prescribe, by order, an area as a Rent Pressure Zone. It provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with the relevant housing authority, may make a written proposal to the Minister that an identified area be prescribed as a Rent Pressure Zone. Within 1 week of receipt of such a proposal, the Minister shall request the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to furnish him, within 2 weeks, with a rent zone report on whether the proposed area satisfies the criteria specified in subsection 24A(4) for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone.

The criteria to be satisfied by an area under section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Acts for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone are as follows:

(a) the information relating to the area, as determined by reference to the information used to compile each RTB Rent Index quarterly report, shows that the annual rate of increase in the average amount of rent for that area is more than 7% in each of at least 4 of the 6 quarters preceding the period immediately prior to the date of the Housing Agency's proposal.

(b) the average rent for the area in the last quarter, as determined by reference to the information used to compile each the RTB Rent Index quarterly report, is above the average national rent (commonly referred to as the Rent Index national standardised rent) in the last quarter.

Therefore, the annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and the average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the Rent Index national standardised rent in the last quarter.

A Rent Pressure Zone calculator is available on the Residential Tenancies Board website at <https://www.rtb.ie/rent-pressure-zones/rpz-calculator>, to assist landlords and tenants in determining if their dwelling is in a Rent Pressure Zone and to calculate the maximum rent amount permitted for their dwelling.

The Housing Agency will continue to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

The RTB's news page on its Rent Index at the following link - <https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/news/latest-data-from-rtb-quarterly-rent-index-q3-2017/> - provides access to the most recent RTB Rent Index quarterly report (for Q3 2017) and summarises its key findings. Information is also provided as part of the RTB's education and awareness campaign relating to Rent Pressure Zones.

Table 9 in the RTB Rent Index Quarterly Index Report illustrates the recent rent changes at Local Electoral Area (LEA) level. The Table outlines for each LEA the number of quarters within the last 6 Quarters where the annualised rent increases have been greater than or equal to 7% and how rent levels in each LEA compares to the Rent Index national standardised rent.

Local Authority Housing Data

179. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties acquired under the relevant legislation, including the

Housing Act 1966 and the Derelict Sites Act 1990, in each of the past five years, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3549/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The specific information requested by the Deputy is not collected by my Department. However, the following information has recently been received from local authorities on the number of homes - as distinct from other properties and sites - acquired by compulsory purchase order under the relevant legislation in respect of the years 2013-2017, and is set out in the table.

It should be noted that these figures include the compulsory purchase of dwellings for housing purposes as well as for other purposes, including the provision of roads.

Local Authority	Number of homes acquired by CPO 2013-2017
Carlow	16
Cavan	0
Clare	5
Cork City	43 further homes are with An Bord Pleanála for CPO decision in January 2018
Cork County	2
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	No return
Donegal	No return
Dublin City	11
Fingal	0
Galway City	3
Galway County	0
Kerry	2
Kildare	4
Kilkenny	0
Laois	0
Leitrim	0
Limerick	4
Longford	0
Louth	46
Mayo	2
Meath	0
Monaghan	20 Some of the properties acquired are not capable of immediate accommodation without significant refurbishment. The Council is preparing to convert some into social housing and offer the remainder for sale.
Offaly	No return
Roscommon	2
Sligo	16
South Dublin	10
Tipperary	0
Waterford	1 Another 1 is currently with An Bord Pleanála for CPO decision.
Westmeath	0
Wexford	2
Wicklow	3

An Bord Pleanála Remit

180. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to remove the power of An Bord Pleanála to disregard local county development plans

when the local county development plan has been written and is keeping in line with national planning guidelines when making its decisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3550/18]

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

In cases on appeal, where a planning authority has refused to grant permission for a proposed development because it would contravene materially the local development plan, and in certain cases where planning applications are made directly to An Bord Pleanála (the Board), the Board may, under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Planning Act), grant planning permission for proposed development that materially contravenes the development plan in specified circumstances only. In this scenario, the Board is required to indicate in its decision its main reasons for doing so.

In this regard, it should be noted that, in making determinations on planning appeals or applications, the Board is required to have regard to not only the local development plan, but also to planning guidelines issued by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, as well as to other relevant Government policies. Development plans are generally drafted and adopted in accordance with national policies and planning guidelines which are current at the time of their adoption. However, there can be instances where new Government policies are adopted after the adoption of a development plan, thereby superseding specific local policies in the development plan, and which consequently the Board is required to have regard to in the determination of planning appeals or applications before it. This can result in the Board attaching greater significance to new and updated Government policy than to a development plan objective that may have been adopted a number of years ago, thereby resulting in the contravening of the development plan in making its determination on a planning appeal or an application by the Board.

In the circumstances, I have no proposals to amend the existing relevant provisions of the Planning Act.

Question No. 181 answered with Question No. 178.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

182. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the process of monitoring and inspecting accommodation for homeless families will begin; if this inspection regime will be independent; and if commercial premises being used to provide homeless accommodation will be inspected. [3574/18]

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

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. This includes operational issues such as ensuring that contracted services are delivered in a professional manner, that inspections take place and that homeless families/individuals can report issues to the relevant authority. In this regard, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has been overseeing the development of a quality standards framework.

The DRHE has been coordinating the development of these standards in consultation with an advisory group which includes representation from various housing authorities, service providers, Tusla, clients and other stakeholders, with a view to having the finalised standards ad-

opted on a national basis by individual housing authorities. The draft standards have been piloted in a number of selected services across the country and positive feedback has been received. I understand that the DRHE are preparing a final draft quality standards framework for formal submission to my Department. Upon receipt, along with any recommendations with regard to implementation from the DRHE and the advisory group, I will give consideration to how such standards could be applied on a national basis by housing authorities.

Homeless Persons Data

183. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families that were placed in family hubs in 2017; and the number of these families that have left family hubs for other accommodation. [3587/18]

184. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families in family hubs; and the length of time these families have spent in family hubs, in tabular form. [3588/18]

185. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families that have been in family hubs for periods of more than three and six months respectively, in tabular form. [3589/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 to 185, inclusive, together.

It is recognised that hotel accommodation is inappropriate for accommodating homeless families for anything other than a short period of time. Accordingly, the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness includes the objective that hotels should only be used as emergency accommodation for families in limited circumstances. To meet this objective, in addition to providing for long-term housing needs, a number of housing authorities are delivering enhanced family-focused facilities, or family hubs.

There are now more than 430 units of family accommodation in operational hub facilities. Further facilities will become operational during the course of 2018. These hubs offer a greater level of stability than is possible in hotels, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured.

The specific data sought in the Question is not available in my Department, and is a matter for the relevant housing authorities. Notwithstanding this, I understand that the housing authorities and service providers concerned are working hard to ensure the progression of homeless families into independent tenancies, as quickly as possible.

Homeless Persons Data

186. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons in hotel accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation in each of the past three years in counties Louth and Meath, by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3597/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports include a breakdown based on accommodation type at the regional level. Commercial hotels and B&Bs are included within the private emergency accommodation (PEA) category as are other commercially provided emergency accommodation arrangements. Specific figures for hotels or B&B usage in counties Louth and Meath are not available in my Department.

Electoral Divisions Establishment

187. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the reconfigured local electoral areas for Cork City and County Councils will be ready for the 2019 local elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3601/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): It is my intention that reconfigured Local Electoral Areas for Cork City and County Councils will be ready for the 2019 local elections and I intend to make the appropriate arrangements in due course, informed by the work of the Cork Implementation Oversight Group.

Housing Data

188. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1816 of 16 January 2018, if the issuing of BER certificates has been used in residential unit completion data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3604/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The data received and published by my Department in respect of ESB connections does not include any variable which would enable matching the dataset with BER certificates and, as such, there is no direct link between the output arising and any dataset in the public domain which is based on these certificates, nor is the data received from the ESB in any way adjusted to reflect the number of BER certificates submitted at any point in time. The BER database is a useful additional data set that my Department utilises to monitor housing activity and quality across the State generally, but the EBS connections data currently provides a more timely and all-encompassing data set for the purpose of measuring housing activity. It is, however, recognised that the ESB data may include some element of reconnections, as set out in the reply to Question no. 1816 of 16th January 2018, and my Department continues to work with the Central Statistics Office and the ESB in this respect.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Data

189. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the tenant purchase scheme sales in each of the years 2000 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3612/18]

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

social housing support for at least one year.

Local authorities are by law (Section 63(1) of the Local Government Act 2001) independent in the performance of their functions. The operation of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is a matter for the local authority concerned, in line with legislation, including the Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015.

Relevant data for 2017 is not yet available. However, information on sale of local authority houses in previous years can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>.

Any sales during the period 2011-2015 inclusive were made under the terms of predecessor schemes to the current Scheme, namely the 1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme or the 2011 Fixed Term Tenant Purchase Scheme for long-standing Tenants.

Vacant Properties Data

190. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the 9,113 voids, derelicts and 2 into 1s that have been delivered under the voids programme by length of time vacant (details supplied). [3615/18]

191. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the 9,113 voids, derelicts and 2 into 1s that have been delivered under the voids programme that cost amounts (details supplied). [3616/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 191 together.

Between 2014 and 2017, some 9,227 vacant units were returned to productive use. Details on the number of voids, derelicts and 2 into 1s brought back into use are set out in the table below. The purpose of the voids programme is to ensure that vacant units are actively targeted and returned to productive use as quickly as possible. Without substantial refurbishment under construction contracts, social homes would have been left vacant and not part of the active social housing stock. Therefore funding the refurbishment and bringing units back into active use means that households who would otherwise not have been housed, can actually be accommodated.

Voids are not classified by the length of time they are vacant. The programme is also designed to support the bringing back into use of units that would likely remain vacant for a significant period of time because the cost of the scale of works required could not be met by the local authority. It is a matter for each local authority to determine suitable properties for inclusion in the programmes.

Under the voids programme, local authorities can claim a maximum of €30,000 funding per unit. However, should they wish to do so, local authorities may also contribute funding from their own resources to complete these works. The derelicts and 2 into 1 programmes require greater levels of remediation with associated higher costs, in excess of the limits as set out in the voids programme. Some 96% of the units refurbished cost €30,000 or less.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, the target under the voids programmes for 2016 to 2021 is 3,459. The number of units that require significant refurbishment is reducing with the target for 2021

set at 170. It is envisaged that these programmes will diminish over time with the local authorities addressing future vacant units that arise through their own planned maintenance programmes. However, it is expected that there will always be some need for voids funding and it is important that it is continued to meet demand to avoid the situation where pre 2014, there was a build up of vacant units awaiting repair.

Voids Data 2014 to 2017: incorporating Voids, Derelicts and 2 into 1 Programmes

-	Units Returned in 2014	Funding 2014	Units Returned in 2015	Funding 2015
Carlow	42	€325,111	28	€300,650
Cavan	23	€349,137	28	€307,018
Clare	65	€995,831	96	€1,472,533
Cork City	212	€2,872,028	281	€4,522,819
Cork County	155	€1,539,363	199	€2,091,578
Donegal	167	€919,797	146	€1,003,576
Dublin City	499	€6,163,465	808	€11,635,088
Fingal	163	€1,938,780	139	€1,624,632
South Dublin	87	€627,407	27	€216,838
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	5	€89,896	24	€262,768
Galway City	26	€474,050	25	€222,025
Galway County	76	€958,263	59	€705,347
Kerry	79	€718,938	127	€884,736
Kildare	49	€503,463	20	€359,808
Kilkenny	25	€484,430	23	€381,639
Laois	43	€257,014	12	€61,228
Leitrim	15	€229,072	9	€177,473
Limerick	94	€915,969	52	€500,689
Longford	16	€313,250	22	€426,535
Louth	14	€113,620	21	€292,279
Mayo	79	€464,508	174	€292,100
Meath	59	€1,037,501	54	€855,565
Monaghan	21	€92,751	13	€100,502
Offaly	30	€514,000	55	€551,532
Roscommon	34	€224,028	36	€258,773
Sligo	29	€311,648	39	€439,924
Tipperary	86	€935,801	115	€1,299,180
Waterford	32	€605,428	56	€488,724
Westmeath	56	€369,518	74	€650,813
Wexford	20	€316,307	24	€294,811
Wicklow	32	€650,204	43	€857,499
-	2,333	€26,310,579	2,829	€33,538,679

Voids Data 2014 to 2017: incorporating Voids, Derelicts and 2 into 1 Programmes ctg.

	Units Returned in 2016	Funding 2016	Units Returned in 2017	Funding 2017	Units Returned 2014 - 2017	Funding 2014 - 2017
Carlow	8	€69,450	8	€91,750	86	€786,961
Cavan	32	€307,530	31	€303,112	114	€1,266,797
Clare	79	€1,329,700	47	€966,203	287	€4,764,267

Questions - Written Answers

	Units Re- turned in 2016	Funding 2016	Units Re- turned in 2017	Funding 2017	Units Returned 2014 - 2017	Fund- ing 2014 - 2017
Cork City	263	€6,812,333	81	€1,485,357	837	€15,692,538
Cork County	98	€1,270,488	48	€1,130,977	500	€6,032,406
Donegal	89	€986,690	168	€1,866,898	570	€4,776,961
Dublin City	575	€8,757,848	543	€8,520,549	2425	€35,076,950
Fingal	147	€1,725,774	121	€1,329,300	570	€6,618,486
South Dublin	81	€703,736	87	€718,446	282	€2,266,427
Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown	19	€183,092	31	€283,531	79	€819,287
Galway City	29	€346,650	11	€124,150	91	€1,166,875
Galway County	37	€472,552	37	€401,159	209	€2,537,321
Kerry	90	€917,549	90	€1,101,143	386	€3,622,366
Kildare	24	€485,130	8	€205,960	101	€1,554,361
Kilkenny	14	€351,278	16	€307,749	78	€1,525,096
Laois	12	€97,053	4	€33,170	71	€448,464
Leitrim	51	€712,404	0	€0	75	€1,118,949
Limerick	18	€384,250	13	€215,520	177	€2,016,427
Longford	23	€506,705	0	€0	61	€1,246,490
Louth	8	€91,523	7	€83,518	50	€580,940
Mayo	25	€233,089	22	€261,986	300	€1,251,682
Meath	76	€1,435,700	52	€768,005	241	€4,096,771
Monaghan	47	€667,944	38	€505,254	119	€1,366,451
Offaly	53	€846,198	7	€107,792	145	€2,019,522
Roscommon	80	€808,612	3	€44,324	153	€1,335,737
Sligo	68	€1,097,909	40	€909,395	176	€2,758,876
Tipperary	102	€1,204,318	107	€1,324,604	410	€4,763,904
Waterford	90	€1,135,973	52	€574,309	230	€2,804,434
Westmeath	43	€436,062	40	€329,113	213	€1,785,506
Wexford	17	€167,007	34	€428,015	95	€1,206,140
Wicklow	10	€245,887	11	€276,778	96	€2,030,368
-	2,308	€34,790,434	1,757	€24,698,067	9,227	€119,337,760

Social and Affordable Housing Data

192. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost per unit of the first tranche of 500 social housing units to be delivered through public private partnerships under Rebuilding Ireland; the length of time this cost is to be paid down; the public service benchmarking exercise underpinning the agreement; and when the five separate developments will commence. [3617/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing PPP Programme involves an investment with a capital value of €300 million. It is to deliver 1,500 social housing units in total, via three bundles.

The first bundle, as referred to by the Deputy, comprises six PPP sites and will provide over 500 units in the Greater Dublin Area. Two of the sites are located in the Dublin City Council area with one each in the County Council areas of South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth.

A contract notice for this bundle was published on 12th May 2017 in the Official Journal of the European Union and expressions of interest were submitted by five candidates. Based on a detailed evaluation of these submissions, the following three candidates have been shortlisted to tender-

- BAM PPP PGGM Cooperative U.A.;
- Comhar; and
- Torc Housing Partnership.

Details regarding these tenderers are available on the National Development Finance Agency website at <http://www.ndfa.ie/social-housing-bundle-1-shortlist/> .

Each individual bundle of PPP sites takes an estimated 37-48 months to deliver in total, including planning, procurement and construction. It is expected that construction on the first bundle of sites will commence later this year, with units becoming available from 2019.

The Social Housing PPP Programme is being delivered through the ‘availability’ based PPP model. Under this type of contract, as the private partner, the PPP project company designs, builds, finances and maintains public buildings on sites provided by the State, in this case through the local authority. Payment is made by the State only once construction of the buildings is complete and the units are ready to house tenants. The payment comprises a monthly ‘availability’ and performance-based payment (or unitary charge) made over the term of the 25-year contract.

The amount of the availability payment is a bid item in the selection of the preferred tender. This means that, when a bidder tenders for the PPP project, the level of monthly payment is considered in assessing the competing tenders. As the Deputy will understand, given that the tender process is currently underway, and in order to ensure that the State receives value for money, these costings are of a commercially sensitive nature.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

193. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses to be delivered in housing developments benefitting from LIHAF funding that will cost in ranges (details supplied). [3618/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

Local Authority	Project name	Total Cost	Projected housing delivery by 2021
Clare	Claureen, Ennis	3.66	200
Cork City	Old Whitechurch Road	9.89	600
Cork City	South Docks	15.50	620
Cork County	Midleton (Water-rock)	5.50	520
Cork County	Carrigaline	0.60	400
Cork County	Glanmire	5.90	300
Dublin City	Dodder Bridge	15.75	1500
Dublin City	Belmayne Clongriffin	3.00	850
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Cherrywood	15.19	2000

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Project name	Total Cost	Projected housing delivery by 2021
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Clay Farm	4.70	350
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Woodbrook Shanganagh	4.16	1242
Fingal	Donabate Distributor Road	15.50	1200
Fingal	Oldtown Mooretown	4.90	800
Fingal	Baldoyle Stapolin	6.18	500
Kildare	Sallins	0.93	250
Kildare	Naas	6.00	800
Kildare	Maynooth	14.50	800
Kilkenny	Ferrybank	0.62	200
Kilkenny	Western Environs	6.76	530
Limerick	Mungret	10.50	400
Louth	Newtown Drogheda	1.22	200
Louth	Mount Avenue Dundalk	3.33	212
Meath	Ratoath	3.15	266
Meath	Farganstown, Navan	5.68	400
South Dublin	Kilcarbery / Corkagh Grange	4.39	1000
South Dublin	Clonburriss SDZ	3.00	1000
Waterford City and County Council	Gracedieu	1.32	200
Waterford City and County Council	Kilbarry	3.39	400
Westmeath	Brawny Road, Athlone	1.83	200

34 projects, at a total cost of €226 million, received preliminary approval for funding in March 2017 under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). Local authorities were allowed to proceed to design phase on all of these projects, pending final approval and sign-off of a grant agreement between my Department and Local Authorities.

To date, I have given final approval for 29 of the 34 infrastructure projects which will activate supply of almost 18,000 housing units, and grant agreements in respect of those projects have been signed. The balance of the projects are being finalised or have been moved for consideration under LIHAF 2 later in 2018.

Within the 18,000 units being advanced, it is expected that increased numbers of social housing over and above the 10% under Part V will be provided. Subject to the planning process and the eventual development applications made, it is estimated that approximately 3,000 of the 18,000 new homes will be for social housing purposes, made up of Part V units and additional social housing which will be provided on the 13 State-owned sites benefiting from the LIHAF-funded enabling infrastructure. On most of these publicly-owned sites, additional affordable housing will also be provided for sale or for rent.

As required under the scheme criteria and conditions, a key focus has been to ensure that there is a proportionate dividend for the State's investment in infrastructure, as demonstrated by either provision of housing at scale at certain prices, a proportionate reduction in house prices across all of the homes being facilitated or a specified number of homes which will benefit from a larger price reduction. I intend to publish summary details on all the approved and advancing projects, once final positions regarding the remaining projects have been reached.

In relation to the 29 sites for which grant agreements have been signed, and subject to completion of the planning process, the number of houses committed to be delivered on each site is set out in the table below.

Based on the information provided by the local authorities in their local agreements and analysis of current house prices in the areas concerned, and recognising the commercial sensitivity around some of the details in the agreements reached, the approved projects outside Dublin are projected to have new homes for sale towards the lower end of the bands identified by the Deputy, while the projects in Dublin are projected to have starter homes available towards the middle and upper end of these bands.

Rental Sector Strategy

194. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the working group on short term letting; when he plans to bring forward legislation or regulations for the sector; and the content of those regulations and-or legislation. [3619/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department has established a Working Group of all the major public stakeholders with a policy interest in Short-Term Letting, to develop guidance in relation to planning applications and changes of use relating to short term lettings and to examine the need for new regulatory arrangements.

The proposals under consideration by the Working Group are aimed at facilitating short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences, known as home-sharing, while protecting existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand, safeguarding neighbourhood amenity and consumer protection, and generating revenue to address any negative externalities of short-term letting.

The Group completed the guidance for local authorities to assist them when considering planning applications relating to short-term lettings. My Department has issued a circular in this regard to all Local Authorities, a copy of which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/circular_pl10_aph3_2017.pdf.

The draft report of the Working Group is currently being finalised and I will consider its recommendations before initiating a targeted public consultation on the proposals.

Rental Sector Strategy

195. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the work of the cost rental expert group; the membership of same; the number of times it has met; and the nature of the work to date of this group. [3620/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 1828 of 16 January 2018 which sets out the position in relation to this matter.

Planning Issues

196. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a report received by his Department on allegations of planning corruption in County Donegal; when he will publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3621/18]

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

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

When I have received the Attorney's advice, which is expected later this month, my Department will finalise a submission for my consideration as to what further appropriate actions are open to me in this regard.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

197. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has communicated to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council its plan to fund a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3622/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am aware of the proposal developed by councillors in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council on a cross-party basis for a social and affordable housing project at the location mentioned and my Department has been in contact with the County Council regarding the proposal.

I understand that the County Council are currently carrying out a feasibility study and once that study is available, they will then be in a position to revert to my Department to discuss potential funding mechanisms.

My Department will be happy to assist in whatever way it can to bring forward this important site. Significant funding from the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) has already been committed in order to build much-needed public infrastructure at that location which will enable the site to be activated as quickly as possible.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

198. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the delivery of affordable housing on the Poolbeg SDZ site. [3623/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In May 2016, the Government designated Poolbeg West as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) because of its potential to deliver a large proportion of the extra homes needed in the centre of Dublin. This was followed by the publication for consultation by Dublin City Council of a detailed planning scheme for the area. The Council prepared a draft planning scheme which was considered by the elected Council members in May 2017. As a statutory consultee for that process, my Department highlighted the importance of the planning scheme addressing a

variety of housing needs.

The Council proposed a material amendment to the Planning Scheme in relation to the tenure mix. As a statutory consultee, my Department made further observations in this regard. The final Planning Scheme was approved by Dublin City Council on 2 October 2017.

Of the 3,500 homes planned to be delivered on these lands, it is intended that 350 units (or 10%) will be delivered as social units under Part V. In addition, a further 550 (or over 15%) will be delivered under a commercial agreement, with the majority earmarked for affordable homes but with potential for additional social housing, particularly designed for older people.

While the progression of the Planning Scheme is ultimately a matter for Dublin City Council, I am committed to working with the Council to deliver these mixed-tenure units on what is a key site for the sustainable development of Dublin City.

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

Housing Data

199. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of repair and leasing units and buy and renew units delivered to date. [3624/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently finalising and validating data from local authorities in order to report detailed progress on the Repair and Leasing Scheme in the final quarter of 2017. This will be published shortly. By the end Quarter 3 of 2017, a total of 292 dwellings had been deemed suitable and local authorities were negotiating with properties owners; a further 231 dwellings were being inspected for suitability by local authorities; 18 Agreements to Lease had been signed.

In relation to the Buy and Renew Scheme, my Department provides funding to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use, from those in good condition to those that need remediation and may have been vacant. During 2017, provisional information shows that funding provided by my Department to local authorities supported around 70 such homes under the scheme. I expect that over the course of 2018, further progress will be made in this area as local authorities close sales on properties identify during 2017 and put in place arrangements for their remediation to make them suitable for social housing use.

Tackling vacancy continues to be a key focus and, in that context, I announced a range of improvements to the existing Repair and Leasing scheme on 22 January 2018 following the second Housing Summit with Local Authority Chief Executives. I will be publishing details of these improvements shortly.

Local Authority Housing Data

200. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing acquisitions for Q3 and Q4 2017, by local authority. [3625/18]

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

and through working with approved housing bodies under a range of delivery options.

Provisional details on social housing delivery in 2017 were published on Monday, 15 January 2018 and are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/social-housing-delivery-2017-ministers-statement>.

A breakdown of these numbers across all local authority areas for 2017 will be published on my Department's website following completion of the necessary validation process. In the meantime, details in respect of delivery up to the end of quarter 3 of 2017 are currently published and available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Rent Pressure Zones

201. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to put the new substantial refurbishment guidelines for the private sector on a statutory footing. [3626/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have recently announced a series of measures in relation to the rental sector, including a change plan to develop and strengthen the role of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) by giving them necessary powers and resources to better protect both tenants and landlords.

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

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

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

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

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

202. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the report on the review of the tenants purchase scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3662/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

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

Film Industry

203. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the sources of funding available through her Department for documentary makers that require support to complete their work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3593/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Primary responsibility for the support and promotion of film making in Ireland, in respect of both the indigenous sector and inward productions, is the responsibility of the Irish Film Board.

Detailed information on the supports including documentary development loans, Production funding is available from the Film Board at the following link <https://www.irishfilmboard.ie/funding>. Other logistical information, including film locations and studios, can be found on the website of the Irish Film Board at www.irishfilmboard.ie. You can also contact the Irish Film Board directly by emailing info@irishfilmboard.ie.

The Irish Film Board is independent in its day-to-day operations and funding decisions are a matter for the Board.

Film tax credit under Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act is also available for certain documentaries called creative documentaries. These are defined in the Schedules 2 and 3 of the Film Regulations 2015 (S.I. 4 of 2015). Applications for this tax credit are made to the Revenue Commissioners in the first instance.