

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 7, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 8 to 18, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 19 to 28, inclusive, answered orally.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

29. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department will request that the EPA carry out an impact study on the effects of increased energy use and its implications for Ireland's obligations under the Paris Agreement (details supplied). [7246/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is already tasked with producing annual projections of greenhouse gas emissions for Ireland, in collaboration with relevant State and other bodies.

A key input to these projections are annual forecasts of energy use, prepared each year by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020. These targets cover sectors of the economy that fall outside the scope of the EU Emissions Trading System, including transport, buildings, agriculture and waste management. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their level in 2005, which was jointly the most demanding reduction target allocated to EU Member States under this Decision.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the EPA in April 2017, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by Ireland's 2020 targets could be between 4% and 6% below 2005 levels by 2020. The projected shortfall to our targets in 2020 reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

Concerning renewable energy, the EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target

also being legally binding. Meeting the 16% target remains challenging.

SEAI has reported that, in 2016, overall energy use increased by 3.7%, while the economy grew by 5.1%. 9.5% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2016 were met from renewable sources. As regards Ireland's renewable electricity target, renewable electricity accounted for 27.2% of total consumption by end 2016. The SEAI's most recent forecast of Ireland's compliance with its renewable energy targets (December 2017) is that Ireland will achieve between 13.2% and 15.4% of its 16% renewable energy target by 2020, indicating that Ireland should be between 82% to 96% of the way to its target.

Ireland will contribute to the Paris Agreement via the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) tabled by the EU on behalf of its Member States, which commits to a reduction of at least 40% in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. This will be met through reductions of 43% in the Emission Trading System (ETS) and 30% in the non-ETS sector compared with 2005 levels.

Ireland's contribution to the overall 30% reduction in the non-ETS sector by 2030, as well as the contributions to be made by other Member States, will be established in the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) proposal, which will replace the current Effort Sharing Decision. In December 2017, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the ESR proposal and I expect that this agreement to be shortly formally endorsed by both the European Parliament and Council. The final agreement sets a target of a 30% reduction in Ireland's 2005 emissions by 2030, with a starting point of May 2019, based on average emissions over the period 2016 to 2018.

Angling Sector Promotion

30. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the supports available to develop angling with particular reference to County Sligo and the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7255/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): In December last, I announced funding of approximate €540,000 by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) for 28 projects under the National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD), which were based on applications received from Counties Sligo, Donegal and Leitrim. These projects are to be implemented over the next year.

IFI's angling sponsorship scheme also supported seven projects in the North West for novice angler events, angling festivals, angling guides and schools' programmes during 2017. I would encourage Angling Clubs and Community Groups to continue to avail of funding supports from IFI.

In addition, Donegal Angling Tourism Alliance, enabled by a strategic alliance with IFI, has been instrumental in progressing the marketing of angling in Donegal. The many initiatives achieved by Donegal Angling Tourism Alliance with IFI support include the launch of Clodha Wheelyboat, a wheelchair accessible flat deck boat at Rooskey Lough in Donegal and the Donegal Angling Holidays project funded by the 'LEADER' programme.

The Deputy will be pleased to know that the much envied accolade of catching the first spring salmon of the year went to an angler fishing in the North West on the River Drowes, County Leitrim, in January. As is traditional, the first fish was the centre of attention at a charity tasting event which this year benefited the North West Hospice.

I propose to circulate with the Official Record the funding awards in the North West under both the Development and Sponsorship programmes.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 26.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

32. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he expects a penetration rate of 100% to be achieved under the national broadband plan. [7342/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will deliver high speed broadband access of a minimum 30 megabits per second to 100% of premises in Ireland.

Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. Since this Government came into office almost 400,000 additional premises have access to a high speed broadband service. This will increase to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by the end of this year and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

Part of that commercial investment is eir's ongoing rural deployment of high speed broadband to 300,000 premises. That deployment is targeting a deliverable of circa 40,000 premises per quarter for this year. Based on that rate of deployment building the NBP high speed network would take approximately three years.

It is a reality of any infrastructure rollout of this scale that there will be those isolated and harder to reach premises and areas which will take longer than this to pass. This is an unavoidable fact. However, it is my firm resolve that the occupants of these premises will not wait any longer than necessary to receive the service they need.

The actions and measures I have initiated through the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce will facilitate as efficient a rollout as possible as well as assisting any ongoing commercial investments.

Working with the Broadband Officers in each Local Authority and with the Department of Rural and Community Development, my Department has identified Strategic Community Points across all counties where services can be connected at an early stage after award of the NBP contract. As fibre connections to villages and communities continue to improve, so to will public wifi which provides people with greater accessibility to better services.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

33. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to provide broadband to counties Roscommon and Galway further to the withdrawal of a company (details supplied) from the national broadband plan. [7252/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Currently some 15,000 premises in Roscommon and 77,000 premises in Galway have access to a high speed broadband service. Of these, around 2,300 premises in Roscommon and 10,800 premises in Galway have been passed as part of eir's on-going rural deployment of Fibre

to the Home and can access a high speed broadband service of up to 1000Mbps.

Just over 24,000 premises in County Roscommon and some 57,000 in County Galway do not currently have access to a high speed broadband service. The Government's National Broadband Plan will deliver this service to every single one of these premises via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

6,000 premises in Roscommon will receive a high speed broadband service through eir's rural deployment before the end of this year, while the remaining 18,000 will be served via the planned State led intervention. In County Galway 18,000 will be served through eir's deployment while 39,000 come under the State intervention.

Other operators are delivering on commercial investment in these counties. SIRO, the Vodafone-ESB joint venture, are currently delivering fibre services in 2 Galway towns, Castlebar and Westport, with plans to roll out fibre services to Roscommon town and Cortober in County Roscommon.

As I outlined in my reply to an earlier question in the House today, my Department's procurement process to engage the company to roll out the high speed network in the intervention area is at an advanced stage. When this process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

Delivering high speed broadband to every citizen in Roscommon, Galway and indeed every other county remains my firm commitment and that of the Government.

National Broadband Plan Administration

34. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will request a review of the commitment contract his Department has with a company (details supplied) relating to the 300,000 homes removed from the NBP in view of that company's withdrawal from the NBP competition; if this contract can be revoked by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7479/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Last April, eir entered into a Commitment Agreement with my Department to deliver high speed broadband to 300,000 premises, predominantly in rural areas. I understand from the company that this represents an investment of €200 million in rural Ireland. Following its withdrawal from the separate procurement process to appoint a company for the State led intervention, eir reaffirmed its commitment to continue delivery of this roll out. Although Quarter 4 2017 figures have yet to be verified by my Department, I understand eir have passed over 120,000 of the identified 300,000 premises.

Some of eir's key commitments as part of the Commitment agreement include a requirement to:

- pass 100% of the 300,575 premises incorporated in the Agreement;
- connect at least 95% of orders made by service providers/end users at the standard regulated connection charge;
- ensure all premises receive the minimum 30 megabits per second download and 6 megabits per second upload speeds. eir has submitted plans to meet this requirement with a predominantly Fibre To The Home build; and

- achieve agreed milestone targets for premises passed each quarter with a completion date of December 2018.

My Department oversees the fulfilment of this commitment on a monthly basis through meetings and reviews of submitted reports. eir is required to submit quarterly reports on the progress of the deployment and these are independently verified by my Department and then published on the Department's website *www.broadband.gov.ie*.

The Commitment Agreement binds eir to its private plans and also includes robust monitoring and enforcement provisions. In this way I am satisfied the Agreement will ensure provision of high speed broadband services to 300,000 premises urgently in need of connection.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the particulars of the deal secured on 21 December 2017 on the effort sharing regulation surrounding climate change emissions targets; the implications for agriculture emissions targets; the emissions reductions his Department expects from the agriculture sector by 2030; the areas of agriculture that will account for the reductions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7478/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 20 July 2016, the European Commission presented a legislative proposal, the "Effort Sharing Regulation" (ESR), setting out binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for Member States for the period 2021 to 2030. The targets cover sectors of the economy that fall outside the scope of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). These sectors, including the built-environment, transport and agriculture, account for almost 55% of total EU-28 emissions and 71% of Irish emissions. The proposal is the successor to the Effort Sharing Decision, which established national emissions targets for Member States in the non-ETS sectors between 2013 and 2020.

For the ESR, targets have been proposed for Member States based on GDP per capita and the cost-effectiveness of domestic emissions reductions within individual Member States. The final agreement sets a target of 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 for Ireland. Mitigation options built into the ESR agreement include land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), and the possibility to transfer credits from the EU ETS.

The ESR was provisionally agreed on 21 December 2017 by the Council and the European Parliament, and following final approval and formal adoption by the Council, it will enter into force.

During the ESR negotiations, I emphasised the need to prioritise a successful conclusion which retains a high environmental ambition for the EU, but provides each Member State with the capacity to contribute to that ambition in a cost-effective and fair manner. I am satisfied that the provisional agreed text provides appropriate recognition of different Member State circumstances, and the need to provide flexibility to reduce emissions as cost-effectively as possible in the context of the overall EU target.

In terms of emissions, the EPA develops national projections on an annual basis, in collaboration with relevant State and other bodies. In addition to this, they also produce emission projections for each sector.

The latest EPA projections were published in April 2017. Greenhouse gas emissions were

projected to 2035 using two scenarios: a 'With Existing Measures' scenario and a 'With Additional Measures' scenario. The With Existing Measures scenario assumes that no additional policies and measures, beyond those already in place by the end of 2015, are implemented. The With Additional Measures scenario assumes implementation of the With Existing Measures scenario in addition to further implementation of Government renewable and energy efficiency targets for 2020, as set out in the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP) and the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP).

Emissions from Agriculture are projected to reduce by 2.4% between 2020 and 2035 under both scenarios. For 2035, it is estimated that fertiliser nitrogen use will reduce from 401,000 tonnes in 2020 to 395,000 tonnes in 2035. The beef herd is forecasted to contract by 11% between 2020 and 2035 from 5.6 million to 4.9 million. These agriculture emissions projections are based on data from Teagasc's FAPRI-Ireland model which were provided to the EPA in December 2015.

In terms of addressing the significant challenge to reduce emissions, I published Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan last July. It provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A key objective of the Plan is to prepare for the emissions targets that Ireland will take on for 2030. The Plan sets out over 70 individual mitigation measures and 106 related actions to reduce emissions in the four sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions (Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use). Action across all sectors will be paramount to building the foundations for Ireland's low carbon transformation, considering the cross-cutting nature of the climate challenge.

The National Mitigation Plan highlights a number of measures that are already contributing to emission reductions in the agriculture sector, including: the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP); Knowledge Transfer Programme; Green, Low Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS); Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS II); Organic Farming Scheme; Smart Farming Programme; Business, Environment and Technology through Training Extension and Research (BETTER) Farms Programme.

Although the Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve either Ireland's proposed 2030 target or the 2050 transition objective, it begins the process of developing medium-to-long-term policy options so as to achieve progressive emissions reductions in each of the four key sectors, and to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

It is important to note that the National Mitigation Plan is a living document that will be updated as on-going analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. This continuous review process reflects the broad and evolving nature of the sectoral challenges outlined in the Plan, coupled with the continued development and deployment of emerging low carbon and cost effective technologies across different sectors of the economy.

The Government will also publish a new National Development Plan soon and this will provide an opportunity for further prioritisation of expenditure required to implement the National Mitigation Plan.

Public Procurement Contracts

36. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Envi-

ronment the steps his Department has taken or will take in the future to ensure that companies competing for State procurement of services, such as the national broadband plan, do not collude with each other in the bidding and competitive tendering process to the detriment of the State's finances; the penalties a company might incur if found to have engaged in such collusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7482/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The State led intervention aims to provide high speed broadband to areas where commercial operators are unlikely to invest.

The nature of this intervention has taken the form of a competitive dialogue procurement procedure. This process is used for complex contracts where a Contracting Authority is seeking technical solutions to go to market on. Typically this is used for large infrastructure projects and is common practice internationally. The competitive dialogue process enables greater participation throughout the process by bidders, with separate dialogues taking place directly with the Department's specialist NBP procurement team and each potential Bidder.

The NBP procurement is structured in accordance with international and EU standards. This includes requirements in respect of canvassing, conflict of interest, collusion and confidentiality.

In line with recognised practice, breach of procurement law may result in the disqualification, rejection or elimination of a bidder from further participation in a procurement process.

Public Procurement Regulations

37. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all contracts awarded by agencies under his remit follow public procurement and competition rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7265/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Adherence to public procurement and competition rules by State agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency.

Procedures for procurement by State Bodies are set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016. In accordance with section 8.16 of the Code of Practice, it is the responsibility of the Board to satisfy itself that the requirements for public procurement are adhered to and to be fully conversant with current value thresholds for the application of EU and national procurement rule. In addition, the Chairperson of each State body is required, in a comprehensive report submitted to the Minister annually, to confirm that the State body is compliant with current procurement rules and guidelines.

As part of its corporate governance responsibilities, my Department monitors compliance by the State bodies with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

38. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he has achieved progress and understanding to advance

the programme to deliver broadband (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7414/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland now have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This will be achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing this rollout by the end of this year. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Although deployment figures for Q4 2017 have not yet been verified by my Department's teams, I understand eir has passed a total of 121,000 premises of the 300,000 identified premises to date.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. One company, eir, publicly withdrew from the procurement process on 30 January, citing "commercial, regulatory and governance issues". While this is regrettable, it is a commercial decision for eir to make. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the enet/sse consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

Delivering high speed broadband to citizens across Ireland remains a firm commitment of mine and this Government.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

Alternative Energy Projects

39. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the potential implications for developing a biomass industry here to sustain current and future power plants in view of the planned investment by Bord na Móna in a biomass facility in the United States of America. [7401/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's Draft Bioenergy Plan establishes the broader context for the development of Ireland's bioenergy sector. It recognises that meeting the demand for biomass from indigenous sources could deliver significant economic and employment benefits and contains measures to stimulate and support the supply of Irish biomass. In the short-term, international supply chains will be required to meet the demand of current and future power plants across the country. The draft Bioenergy Plan is currently being updated to reflect the developments which have taken place since its original publication and will be published for public consultation.

There has been significant progress to date in the use of biomass which, in 2016, provided the vast majority of the 6.8% of energy consumption in the heat sector that came from renewable sources. The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat will open up new opportunities for indigenous biomass feedstock producers by incentivising opportunities for renewable heat technologies including biomass boiler installations.

It is Bord na Móna's stated policy to prioritise domestic biomass supply. Every domestic tonne sourced by the company displaces an imported tonne. In addition, Bord na Móna Bioenergy is supporting the development of the domestic biomass market by mobilising the biomass supply potential of the privately-owned forestry sector and thereby providing further opportunities for sustainable indigenous employment.

It should be noted that Bord na Móna will require my consent as shareholder, as well as the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, before proceeding with the development of a US biomass production facility. To date, no consent request to this effect has been received by my Department.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

40. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he is taking to advance the development of solar energy here; the amount of solar power he anticipates will be generated here in each of the years 2018 to 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7335/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department is developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which is being designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal which compared the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable technologies including Solar PV at various scales including Utility (farm scale) to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. The assessment included analysis of the optimum financial support mechanisms for renewable technologies, in line with the 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines.

The new scheme will be defined by a series of renewable electricity auctions, where the most cost effective projects within an auction structure will receive financial support in the form of a premium, in addition to the price they receive from the market.

I am aware of the very strong level of interest in solar PV in Ireland and the most recent data available to me indicates that at present, there are 621 solar applications at the distribution level and 37 solar applications at the transmission level, at various stages in the grid connection application process. These applications amount to 4,398 Megawatts and 2,135 Megawatts

respectively or 6,533Megawatts in total.

It is widely recognised that solar photovoltaic (PV) technology has become more cost competitive for electricity generation over the last few years, not only compared with other renewables but also compared with conventional forms of generation. Furthermore, a recent report by the the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA 2017) forecasts that solar PV costs will continue to fall by a further 50% out to 2020.

Notwithstanding the level of solar applicants seeking connection to the grid and acknowledging that solar PV does have a role to play in Ireland's energy future, the cost effectiveness of the new scheme is a key policy objective. I cannot stand over a scenario whereby electricity customers are locked into higher prices now for renewable energy as renewable technology costs fall. While increasing diversity of the renewable energy mix is one of several policy objectives the new RESS is trying to deliver, falling technology costs by themselves may lead to increased diversity of the renewable portfolio over the medium term.

Following on from the recent RESS public consultation and review, a final design proposal will be brought to Government for approval in the coming months, including the overall costs and technologies to be supported. A formal application for State Aid clearance from the European Commission will then commence.

At this stage no final decisions have been made as regards which technologies will be supported under the new RESS.

Landfill Sites

41. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to concerns of persons in County Kildare regarding the expansion of a landfill site (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7336/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Issues pertaining to planning legislation, including the legislation which regulates Strategic Infrastructure Development applications, are matters for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Licensing) Regulations 2004 govern the process under which waste licences are applied for and maintained. Once granted, each waste licence defines the nature of environmentally acceptable activities that can take place at a waste facility, including the acceptable types of waste that can be received. This is done by the conditions of the licence which are set by the Environmental Protection Agency. I have no function in relation either to the setting of operating conditions or to their enforcement, and under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, as Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the Environmental Protection Agency, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it.

Trading Online Voucher Scheme

42. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the trading online voucher scheme is being expanded; the number of businesses which have availed of the scheme in County Offaly in 2017 and since its

introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7254/18]

81. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the uptake of the trading online voucher scheme by county both in 2017 and since the scheme's introduction; if the scheme is being expanded; if so, if such an expansion will include data protection and cyber security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7261/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 81 together.

My Department's Trading Online Voucher Scheme is designed to support micro businesses (10 or less employees, less than €2 million turnover) to develop their trading online capability. The scheme pairs training with financial support of up to €2,500 (subject to matched funding), to help small businesses to grow and diversify their markets through trading online. It specifically targets businesses who are not yet trading online or doing so in a very limited way. This is a demand-led scheme, which is funded by my Department, and delivered in every county by the Local Enterprise Office.

By the end of 2017, over 4,100 small businesses had successfully applied for a trading online voucher and over 10,600 businesses in total had benefited through participation in training sessions delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices under the scheme since it began in 2014.

This year I have provided funding to increase the target number of businesses supported from 1,000 per annum to 1,500 in 2018. My Department is currently scoping initiatives to build on the success of the scheme, including the development of a national website and centralised web-based infrastructure for online application to the scheme.

As part of this, my Department, in collaboration with our partners in the delivery of the scheme, will explore ways in which the scheme can promote awareness of the latest digital trends, including topics such as data protection and cybersecurity, in the context of its primary objective which is to increase the demand for broadband products and services.

The following table provides information on the number of applications approved under the scheme by county, including Offaly, from 2014 to date.

County	2014/2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
Carlow	47	22	12	81
Cavan	18	14	20	52
Clare	24	37	32	93
Cork City	51	35	33	119
Cork North/ West	103	55	44	202
Cork South	93	45	36	174
Donegal	63	24	47	134
Dublin City	137	98	140	375
Dublin South	32	37	38	107
Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown	121	75	78	274
Fingal	101	51	51	203
Galway	26	58	43	127
Kerry	85	85	60	230
Kildare	73	24	42	139

County	2014/2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
Kilkenny	68	27	28	123
Laois	25	18	11	54
Leitrim	37	18	12	67
Limerick	77	58	49	184
Longford	15	12	15	42
Louth	42	39	55	136
Mayo	34	22	29	85
Meath	21	11	30	62
Monaghan	23	23	17	63
Offaly	30	14	15	59
Roscommon	26	19	22	67
Sligo	57	23	22	102
Tipperary	63	33	37	133
Waterford	61	49	42	152
Westmeath	38	26	29	93
Wexford	54	44	33	131
Wicklow	132	58	67	257
TOTAL	1,777	1,154	1,189	4,120

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

43. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the moral obligations to reduce emissions due to the effects climate change is having on the developing world as highlighted by a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7409/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am fully cognisant of the urgent, global challenge of climate change and its effects, particularly those experienced in the developing world. The scale and complexity of this challenge demands a coordinated approach at both national and international levels. Ireland is committed to concerted multilateral action to tackle climate change through the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with an ambition of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The Agreement is designed to meet this objective through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted by all parties to the agreement.

Ireland will contribute to the achievement of these objectives through the NDC submitted by the European Union on behalf of its Member States, committing to a reduction of at least 40% in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.

In the context of Ireland’s commitment to and solidarity with our developing country partners, I was pleased to be able to announce last November in Bonn that Ireland will join the NDC Partnership, an initiative which represents a highly practical approach to sharing capacity and policy insights with our developing country partners towards meeting their commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Ireland made a commitment in 2015 to provide at least €175 million in public funding on climate action between 2016 and 2020, and reported a total of €52.7 million in funding in 2016. The majority of this funding supports adaptation and mitigation action in developing coun-

tries, largely in sub-Saharan Africa, through the Official Development Assistance budget of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. My Department made contributions of €4.5 million over 2016 and 2017, supporting the Green Climate Fund, the NDC Partnership, and a number of other international climate initiatives.

Geological Survey of Ireland

44. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his view on the value of the geoscience sector here as determined by a recent analysis of the sector; the steps he is taking to maximise the value of the sector to local economies and communities, such as the development of geoparks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7257/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Geological Survey Ireland, as part of my Department, commissioned a report in 2017 on the Economic Value of the Geoscience Sector, which gave an overall economic impact of over €3.2 billion with employment of almost 25,000 full-time equivalents in 2016. This shows the impact of the sector to be much more significant than initially perceived with wider societal impacts and potential for future expansion.

GSI is working to support and expand the geoscience sector and its regional impact in a number of ways. The on-going work of the GSI is supported by exchequer funding through my Department's Vote with a total of €12.6 million provided in the Vote in 2018.

GSI manage the Tellus programme, which is carrying out national airborne sensing and ground sampling to produce updated geological and chemical maps. The outputs from this programme, which is now completed over more than half the country, help to update GSI's geological mapping and also supports areas such as environmental planning, agricultural planning, plant and animal health and the national Radon Control Strategy. Updated Tellus data is also used by the mineral exploration industry and attracts foreign direct investment and spending in rural areas.

Groundwater mapping, being carried out nationally at GSI, supports the protection of Drinking Water and compliance with EU Directives. This involves working closely with the National Federation of Group Water Schemes to map and protect their groundwater supplies as part of a multiannual programme. The work also defines groundwater supplies that can be used to support future regional development.

In terms of business development, GSI manages the Geoscience Ireland business cluster, which works with Enterprise Ireland to help win work overseas and secure jobs for Irish companies in this sector. The majority of these companies are located outside of Dublin and are headquartered throughout the country. Since 2012, Geoscience Ireland companies have collectively added a net 754 jobs up to end 2017.

Geotourism is supported through the promotion and development of UNESCO Global Geoparks and geotourism projects. This includes technical and financial support for the three Unesco Global Geoparks in counties Waterford, Clare and Cavan and various proposed geopark projects in counties Galway and Mayo. In addition, GSI is carrying out a national programme of county audits of geoheritage sites, which helps underpin and protect the sites located within Geoparks.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

45. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress which has been made by the mobile broadband task force implementation group on the 40 recommendations identified in the final report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7340/18]

49. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to provide a report on the achievements and successes of the mobile telephone and broadband task force recommendations to date; the further recommendations he plans to implement; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the nationwide experience is that mobile telephone signals are deteriorating and the services worsening despite the task force report being published since December 2016; if his attention has been further drawn to the anxiety many rural households have about rural broadband provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7260/18]

66. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the upgrade of the national mobile telephone coverage plan; the steps he is taking to improve it in accordance with the measures and timetables set out in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7253/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 45, 49 and 66 together.

Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations. The ComReg consumer helpline is accessible at consumerline@comreg.ie and I would urge consumers who feel they have not received an appropriate response from service providers to make contact with the Regulator.

Notwithstanding ComReg's independence, I recognise the frustration felt by Irish consumers where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, 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 action 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:

- Revisions to Exempted Development Regulations to facilitate prompt roll-out of telecommunications infrastructure and to prepare Ireland for the roll-out of 5G mobile technology;

- Funding of all local authorities to assign a Broadband Officer;
 - Close cooperation with local authorities to develop local digital strategies and to identify approximately 320 high speed Strategic 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.

Renewable Energy Generation

46. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the renewable energy support scheme; the date by which this scheme will be launched; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7468/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department is developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which is being designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable technologies, at various scales, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. A public consultation on the new Scheme, which closed in November 2017, resulted in over 1,250 responses and analysis of these is almost complete.

Following on from the RESS public consultation and review, a final design proposal will be brought to Government for approval in the coming months, including the overall costs and technologies to be supported. Subsequent to a Government decision, a formal application for State Aid clearance from the European Commission will commence. The new scheme is expected to open in 2019.

At this stage no final decisions have been made as regards which technologies will be supported under the new RESS.

National Development Plan

47. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the input his Department has had in the framing of the national development plan with regard to ensuring the viability of the rural post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7481/18]

60. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the input his Department has had to the national development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7473/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 60 together.

My Department has worked closely with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in framing the National Development Plan, and will oversee a significant programme of capital investment during the 10 year period of the Plan.

Climate mitigation and adaptation are cross-cutting priorities for Government and for me. Public and private sector investment choices over the coming decade will play a critical role in ensuring that Ireland is on a sustainable trajectory towards securing the national objective of a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy and society by 2050.

Building on the approach set out in the Government's National Mitigation Plan, the National Development Plan includes a strong focus on strategic investments in the areas of transport, agriculture, energy and the built environment to address the significant climate change challenges we face. Action now to decarbonise these sectors will position Ireland to harness a range of benefits into the future, in terms of the creation of sustainable green jobs, sustainable food production, deepening our energy security, improving the quality of our lives and making our working and built environments healthier.

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

Delivery of the new high speed broadband network under the National Broadband Plan will ensure that the opportunities presented by the digital transformation are available to every community in Ireland. Fast, secure, high capacity digital connectivity will underpin balanced regional development, allow new businesses and services to emerge and increase Ireland's competitiveness and attractiveness as a place to live and do business. In a similar way, An Post, in its strategic plan, is embracing the opportunities presented by the digital agenda and harnessing its existing strengths such as its nationwide reach, trusted brand and the relationship with communities to develop new products and services. Further opportunities will be available to the post office network, as the step change in digital connectivity is extended across the country to villages and rural areas.

During the lifetime of the National Development Plan, capacity will continue to be built in sustainable waste management and resource efficiency, including recycling, waste to energy, landfill and landfill remediation. Such investments, along with support measures to prevent food waste, will be critical to environmental and economic well-being for a growing population, and to achieving EU circular economy and climate objectives.

Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 26.

Question No. 49 answered with Question No. 45.

National Broadband Plan Administration

50. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he and his Department will ensure value for money for the taxpayer in the national broadband plan process in view of the fact that only one bidder remains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7407/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband service. This will be achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. One company, eir, publicly withdrew from the procurement process last month. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the sse/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland.

The procurement process, which is a very robust process with strong risk management throughout, reached an advanced stage prior to eir's withdrawal. "Detailed Solutions" submitted by two bidders on 26th September 2017 had already been evaluated by the NBP specialist team and detailed feedback had been delivered. This means that the process has had the benefit of strong competitive tension up until now, which will help inform the NBP procurement team in ensuring that value for money is achieved at final tender stage. The NBP procurement team also have the benefit and will use comparative costings from similar projects in other Member States together with advice from ComReg, the sectoral regulator with responsibility for the cost of access to the eir pole and duct infrastructure, where relevant to the final bid.

The final contract which will result from the NBP procurement process will ultimately be subject to Government approval on the level of subsidy to be provided once a final bid has been received. This subsidy must also be independently reviewed as providing value for money by the National Development Finance Agency as is required for all Government Capital Projects with a value of more than €20 million. The contract will also be subject to audit and review provisions to ensure that any potential over recovery of State Aid post contract by the bidder can be recovered by the State; this is also a requirement under the European Commission State Aid Guidelines for Broadband being followed by the Department.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

51. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated level of fines that Ireland will face by missing the 2020 renewable energy targets; the short-term and immediate actions he is taking to reduce these fines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7334/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is com-

mitted to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target also being legally binding.

While good progress has been made to date, with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) advising that 9.5% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2016 were met from renewable sources, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. The SEAI's most recent assessment is that Ireland will achieve between 13.2% and 15.4% of its 16% renewable energy target by 2020, indicating that Ireland should be between 82% to 96% towards its target.

The Renewable Energy Directive provides a comprehensive framework for Member States to work towards achieving individual and EU renewable energy targets, including mechanisms for countries to work together such as statistical transfers, which allow Member States to meet their targets by purchasing credits from Member States that overachieve on their renewable targets.

In the absence of an established market mechanism, estimates of the cost of using instruments such as statistical transfers are necessarily tentative. Work undertaken by the SEAI in 2016 indicated that the cost to Ireland of not meeting our overall renewable energy targets may be in the range of €65 million to €130 million for each percentage point Ireland falls short of the overall 16% renewable energy target. Costs per percentage point for statistical transfers could be below the lower end of the range suggested by SEAI but this will depend on market conditions when and if purchases are made. Present indications – based on trades agreed by Luxembourg late last year - are that the costs per percentage point for statistical transfers could be below the lower end of the range suggested by SEAI.

While the focus of my Department remains firmly on meeting our 2020 target and on implementation of renewable energy measures, including a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and a new Support Scheme for Renewal Heat (SSRH), contingency planning has commenced to explore the potential extent, mechanisms and cost of addressing our target within the framework of the Directive.

Any requirement for statistical transfers to meet compliance would be undertaken against a background of discussions by the Irish authorities with the EU Commission and relevant Member States. As any purchases arising would be made over a period, the costs to the Exchequer of acquiring statistical transfers to meet any potential shortfall would be spread over a period of more than one year and in any event the cumulative costs would not be known until 2021, the deadline for completion of all purchases.

National Mitigation Plan Implementation

52. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when each of the sectoral adaption plans for climate change mitigation will be published; the planned measures of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7477/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I published Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan in July 2017 which sets out the measures proposed by the key sectors concerned for enabling a low carbon transition.

Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework was approved by Government in December 2017 and was published and laid before the Oireachtas on 19 January 2018, in line with Section 6(5) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (the Climate Act). The Framework sets out the context to ensure Local Authorities, regions and key sectors

can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making.

Under the Framework, seven Government Departments (or Agencies, where appropriate) with responsibility for the twelve priority sectors identified in the Framework are required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in line with the requirements of Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Climate Act and the policies laid out in the Framework. The Framework does not identify specific locations or propose adaptation measures or projects in relation to sectors. Respecting the principle of subsidiarity, detailed adaptation measures will be developed across sectors and Local Government, in accordance with the Framework.

Under Section 6(1) of the Climate Act, within three months of the Framework being laid before the Oireachtas, the Government must then request relevant Ministers to submit to the Government their sectoral adaptation plans within a specified period. The specified period, or deadline, for submission of plans to Government has yet to be finalised and will need to balance the need for urgent action with the need to allow sectors sufficient time to prepare plans that are fully in line with the requirements of the Framework and the Climate Act, while also accounting for mandatory consultation and Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment processes. The deadline selected will not preclude sectors from completing sectoral plans before the chosen deadline, if they are in a position to do so, and indeed this is desirable to ensure plans are submitted to Government for approval as soon as is practical. I will be bringing a Memorandum to Government shortly so as initiate the process for the preparation of sectoral plans.

It should, however, also be noted that under the non-statutory 2012 National Climate Change Adaptation Framework which has now been superseded by the National Adaptation Framework, four draft sectoral plans covering five sectors have already been developed, including for flood risk management, agriculture and forestry, transport, and the electricity and gas networks. These plans will be reviewed and updated in line with the requirements of the new National Adaptation Framework.

Energy Prices

53. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to use his powers under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 to issue a policy direction to the Commission for Energy Regulation in regard to competition in the electricity supply market in view of domestic electricity prices. [7402/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Responsibility for the regulation of the gas or electricity markets is a matter for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). One of its statutory functions is to carry out market monitoring to ensure that competition continues to develop and that customers benefit from competition. Two reports published by the regulator last year concluded that Irish energy markets are competitive, with the most recently available EU comparable electricity and gas supplier switching data also pointing towards a competitive Irish market. The CRU is an independent statutory body, and solely accountable to a committee of the Oireachtas for the performance of its functions.

The regulation of retail market prices for electricity in Ireland ended in 2011 and for gas prices in 2014. The Government has no statutory function in the monitoring or setting of electricity prices, with the main thrust of Government policy on energy costs focused on the com-

petitive market and supports for energy efficiency. Government policy has supported competition to drive down prices, and data from approved price comparison sites (www.bonkers.ie and www.switcher.ie) shows that consumers can make significant savings by switching energy suppliers.

Consistent with European energy policy, the electricity and gas markets in Ireland are commercial, liberalised, and competitive. The position of successive Governments has been that competitive energy markets result in greater choice for consumers and businesses, in terms of suppliers, products and prices. Competition exerts downward pressure on suppliers' prices.

Section 10A of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, sets out the procedure under which the Minister may give "general policy directions". The legislation sets out details on the tasks and inter-alia timelines, consultation requirements with the independent regulator and Oireachtas, and identifies restrictions on the areas where such directions may not be given.

Energy markets in Ireland operate within a European regulatory regime in which member states must guarantee the independence of National Regulatory Authorities, which are expressly forbidden from taking direct instructions from government, or any public body, when carrying out their regulatory tasks. The regime also restricts policy directions in the form of general policy guidelines in certain areas that are prescribed regulatory duties and powers in the EU Third Energy Package, specifically in Directive 2009/72/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity. A policy direction in this matter is therefore not being considered.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

54. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the alternative plans being considered by his Department for rolling out the national broadband plan since a company (details supplied) pulled out of the procurement process; the measures he is taking to prevent further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7471/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The procurement process for the National Broadband Plan State Intervention Area has been a very robust process with strong risk management throughout, with all scenarios and eventualities having been considered.

This process is entering its final stages, with the remaining bidding consortium having reaffirmed its commitment to the successful conclusion of that process.

Energy Policy

55. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress which has been made on the creation of an all-Ireland energy market. [7343/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Single Electricity Market (SEM) is the wholesale electricity market for Ireland and Northern Ireland and it has operated successfully on this island since 2007. It has delivered an efficient, cost reflective, competitive market, while assuring security of supply and integrating significant volumes of renewable electricity into the generation mix.

As a result of the common EU policy of delivering the Internal Energy Market and Energy

Union and following European legislation aimed at harmonising cross-border trade in electricity, the SEM will have to change how it operates. The development of the associated new wholesale market rules is a Regulator-led project, with oversight by my Department and the Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DfE) to ensure legal and policy compliance. The Integrated-Single Electricity Market (I-SEM) project, to design and implement the new rules, has been underway since 2012. Legislation was amended in Ireland and Northern Ireland to allow the Regulators make the necessary changes to the electricity market rules. The new market will go live in 2018.

The benefits will include more competitive wholesale electricity prices for consumers through more efficient market trading; efficient dispatch of interconnection to other markets; and increased security of supply for Ireland.

As regards the all island gas market, the Common Arrangements for Gas (CAG) project commenced in 2008 between Northern Ireland and Ireland. It aimed to harmonise technical operations of the gas transmission networks in both jurisdictions. The project was superseded by EU internal gas market developments that require the implementation of binding EU-wide gas network codes in Member States, including Ireland and Northern Ireland. These EU network codes are the EU rules for cross-border gas trading.

Renewable Energy Generation

56. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps his Department will take to practically support the inclusion of community based micro energy generation initiatives in the renewable energy support scheme. [7245/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department is developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which is being designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable technologies, at various scales including micro-generation, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. A public consultation on the new Scheme, which closed in November 2017, resulted in over 1,250 responses and analysis of these is almost complete.

A cornerstone of the new scheme will be the provision of pathways for increased community based ownership and participation in and benefit from renewable electricity projects in line with the 2015 Energy White Paper. Communities and citizens are effectively being designed into the fabric of the new scheme and the SEAI in conjunction with my Department have recently completed a comprehensive assessment of policies and support measures to underpin and deliver this ambition.

One of the highest ranking community measures proposes a separate ‘community-led’ category for projects that are initiated or majority owned by individuals or groups within the local community. We also need to address measures to support citizens and community groups, who may wish to develop their own project or participate in a developer-led project, overcome legal, financial and technical barriers to renewable electricity generation. This ambition is now being mirrored across the EU as part of the recast Renewable Energy Directive, which will establish the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers and renewable energy communities.

Micro generation was also appraised as part of the RESS economic assessment and the analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before a support scheme for micro generation can be developed. Notwithstanding this, I am committed to further exploring opportunities for supporting micro generation and in October 2017 my Department and the SEAI hosted a workshop on micro generation at which a number of these challenges were discussed with relevant stakeholders. On foot of this workshop and further engagement with the micro generation industry, I have asked the SEAI to conduct a short study to assess the likely demand for and impact of micro generation, among the public. It is my intention to launch a grant aided pilot scheme this summer for solar PV micro generation initially targeted at self-consumption and for domestic properties.

My Department will continue to work with the micro generation sector and the SEAI to better understand how to validate and further develop these policies in a fair and cost effective manner.

It is also worth pointing out the SEAI's Better Energy Communities scheme currently supports micro generation vis-à-vis grant aiding a portion of costs associated with a solar PV installation.

Waste Management Regulations

57. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department is examining phasing out the use of non-compostable disposable cups in all Government buildings, including the Kildare Street and Merrion Street campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7264/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Article 18 of the EU Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste states the following: "Member States shall not impede the placing on the market of their territory of packaging which satisfies the provisions of this Directive". Coffee cups and a range of other single use packaging fall under the definition of packaging for the purposes of this Directive. In this space, where it is not in my power to place an outright ban on non-compostable items, such as disposable cups, I am looking at other means of curbing their use.

The Deputy will be aware I recently announced that I am considering introducing a levy on disposable coffee cups in an attempt to effect environmental behavioural change and incentivise individuals to use their own cups on the go. While the policy in this regard is at a very early stage in the process, a levy such as this has proved very successful in the past in curbing the use of plastic bags.

In addition, I strongly welcome the European Commission adopting a strategy on plastics, on 16 January 2018, as part of our transition to a more circular economy. It will protect the environment from plastic pollution whilst fostering growth and innovation, turning a challenge into a positive agenda for Europe. Under the new plans, all plastic packaging on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030, the consumption of single-use plastics will be reduced and the intentional use of microplastics will be restricted. I will shortly be bringing this strategy to the attention of all Government departments and asking them to consider how they might contribute to meeting these ambitious goals.

National Development Plan

58. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the national development plan contains targets and projects for retrofitting homes; if his Department had an input into same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7474/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As set out in successive planning documents, such as the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan and National Mitigation Plan, both published in 2017, increasing the level and depth of energy efficiency upgrades to homes remains at the centre of policy in this area. This is reflected in the level of funding for these supports, which I have increased to €84m for 2018.

While much has been achieved in improving energy efficiency in the residential sector, it is clear that, post 2020, the scale and depth of the measures undertaken must significantly increase. This is why pilot projects such as the Deep Retrofit and Warmth & Wellbeing schemes are already underway. These cutting edge initiatives are creating the evidence base necessary for the increase in effort, and investment we know we will have to make on improving residential energy efficiency in the period to be covered by the forthcoming National Development Plan.

Energy Efficiency

59. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase the flexibility and grounds on which persons can apply for the warmth and well-being grant. [7266/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Warmth and Wellbeing scheme is a joint policy initiative between my Department and the Department of Health under the Healthy Ireland framework, which aims to measure the health and wellbeing impacts of improving the energy efficiency of a person's home. I have allocated €20m to the pilot scheme under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty for the period 2016-18. The scheme is being delivered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and the Health Service Executive.

The scheme is being piloted in Community Healthcare Organisation 7 and is open to people aged 55 and over or 12 and under who are living with chronic respiratory conditions in households that are in receipt of the Fuel Allowance or the One-Parent Family Payment. Further, eligible applicants must be living in one of the pilot scheme areas - Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 or 24.

As a pilot scheme that is 100% Exchequer funded, the resources available to the scheme are limited, and so it has targeted eligibility requirements in relation to medical and income needs. As well as needing to meet the medical, age and home location criteria, participation is limited to those deemed to be living in or at risk of energy poverty. To determine this with complete accuracy SEAI would need to know the condition of a person's home, including its energy efficiency level and heating system, that person's family circumstances and their household income level. However, it would not be practical or efficient for SEAI to perform this assessment for each applicant to the scheme. Therefore this is instead determined through the use of proxy indicators, principally the National Fuel Allowance. These proxy indicators provide an acceptable approximation that allows SEAI to identify that people are in or at risk of energy poverty without having to resort to a cumbersome, expensive and intrusive administrative regime.

An independent research project is underway to 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 extension of any application criteria will be considered.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 47.

Energy Policy

61. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to establish a biogas industry as an indigenous source of energy and an alternative to fossil fuels. [7400/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Having regard to the range of areas such as forestry, agriculture, waste, research funding and business development that have a role in the development of bioenergy, there are a wide range of Government Departments, agencies and State bodies that are critical enablers for the development of the sector. The draft Bioenergy Plan sets out the policy areas that must be coordinated to support the development of the bioenergy sector in Ireland. It identifies a number of supply-side and demand-side measures to support the sustainable development of the sector.

Since its publication, a number of the actions set out have progressed significantly, such as the approval by Government of a new Support Scheme for Renewable Heat. Furthermore, the publication of the Energy White Paper (Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future) and the National Mitigation Plan have provided an updated policy context. The draft bioenergy Plan is being updated to reflect these and other policy developments. The updated plan along with a Strategic Environmental Assessment and NATURA Impact Statement is currently under development and will be published for public consultation.

The production of biogas and biomethane from anaerobic digestion has significant potential in Ireland. Biogas can be utilised to generate electricity and in the heat sector. Biomethane, produced by removing impurities from biogas, can be used as a substitute for natural gas and can be injected directly into the gas network or used as a transport fuel. In addition to being a source of renewable energy, it can also provide an outlet for farm wastes.

An assessment of the costs and benefits of biogas and biomethane was undertaken by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and published. This formed part of the detailed economic assessment on the design and cost of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat.

Operational support for anaerobic digestion heating systems will form part of the first phase of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat. Other technologies and methods of support are under consideration for subsequent phases of the scheme, including biomethane grid injection. In this regard, my Department continues to examine how best to support biomethane production. This included a stakeholder workshop to examine potential support options with industry stakeholders held last month.

Cyber Security Policy

62. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps being taken to enhance cyber security particularly in view of the networks information systems directive which must be transposed by May 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7256/18]

87. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Envi-

ronment if he will report on the work to ensure adherence to the network information systems directive with particular reference to cyber security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7251/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 87 together.

Cyber security is a critically important area for Government, business and citizens alike, having regard to the potential implications for the infrastructure that people and services rely on. Since the formation of the National Cyber Security Centre in my Department in 2011 and the publication of the National Cyber Security Strategy, my Department has been working on a series of measures to further protect critical national infrastructure in addition to the existing work of the National Cyber Security Centre.

Some of these measures flow from the European Union Directive on Network and Information Security, and will involve applying binding security requirements on a selection of key infrastructure providers and certain online service providers. My Department informed those infrastructure operators likely to be formally designated of their status in September 2017, and published the draft set of security requirements for these infrastructure operators for public consultation in November. These operators span a wide range of areas, including the energy, healthcare, transport, and telecommunications sectors.

In addition to critical national infrastructure, the Directive also requires that States apply a new regulatory regime to Digital Service Providers (DSPs). These will include cloud computing providers, search engines providers and providers of online market places. Critically, the State will have responsibility for dealing with the security of services provided across the European Union by multinational companies that have their European headquarters located in Ireland.

My Department is currently giving priority to the process of transposing this Directive into national law in advance of the transposition deadline of May 2018. I have asked my officials to arrange for the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action & Environment to have an opportunity to examine the draft legislation when it has been finalised.

Broadband Service Provision

63. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address problems with broadband provision in the western areas of County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7249/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland now have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection.

In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of this year as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

There are approximately 46,500 premises in the constituency of Dublin West. Approximately 900 (2%) fall within the AMBER area and will be covered under the State led Intervention. More than 45,400 (98%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be covered by commercial providers. Less than 1% of premises in Dublin West are LIGHT BLUE.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to engage a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the sse/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

Delivering high speed broadband to citizens across Ireland remains my firm commitment and that of this Government.

I recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland and fully appreciate the frustration felt by people, such as those in Dublin West, who do not currently have access to this level of connectivity. The vital broadband connections these people need to live, work and learn will be delivered by the National broadband Plan.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website which is available at <http://www.ruralireland.ie/policies/national-broadband-plan/>.

Departmental Bodies Establishment

64. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the deadline by which his Department in conjunction with the Departments of Justice and Equality and Children and Youth Affairs will appoint a digital safety commissioner. [7469/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): The subject of online safety for all individuals but especially for children is of vital concern and importance to me. This issue is a complex and multifaceted one and effective actions in this area rely on the active engagement of all stakeholders including Government, technology companies and parents. On Tuesday 21 November 2017 I convened a meeting with my colleagues, the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and their officials to discuss online safety issues, including the various initiatives which are taking place at a national and European level to tackle illegal or harmful content online.

Recognising that there are already a range of diverse activities being taken by many Government Departments, by the European Commission, by industry and by stakeholders, we agreed at this meeting to further progress the matter of digital safety through an Open Policy Debate. The Open Policy Debate will take place on Thursday 8 March in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. The establishment of an Office of a Digital Safety Commissioner is one of a number of proposals which will be discussed during this event.

My Department is co-ordinating this open policy debate with the support and participation of the Departments of Justice & Equality; Education & Skills; Business, Enterprise and Innovation; Health; and Children and Youth Affairs. My Department is also engaging with the relevant online platforms, ISPCC, parents' groups and other key stakeholders who will be participating in the initiative. The overall aim of the event is to raise awareness among all participants of the activities which are being undertaken by the Irish Government, by the European Commission, by industry and NGOs.

It is intended that the event will identify issues requiring further consideration and areas where additional cooperation between stakeholders would be beneficial. Following the event, I will engage further with my Ministerial colleagues in relation to these matters.

Television Licence Fee Collection

65. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to tackle the mass evasion of the television licence by households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7248/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am very much aware of the challenges that face the existing TV Licence system including the current level of evasion which is estimated to be 14.6%. While the rate has fallen from 15.3% at the end of 2013, it is still very high and equates to a loss of €40m per annum to public service broadcasting.

To address this issue, my Department has been working with An Post and RTÉ on an on-going basis to ensure that the TV licence collection system is working as effectively as possible. Measures such as marketing campaigns, more evening and weekend inspection and appointment of additional temporary inspectors are just some of the initiatives that have been utilised to enhance sales and improve compliance rates.

While these measures are important steps, I believe that the current system needs to be reformed. As the Deputy will be aware, I obtained Government approval last year to draft a number of legislative amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009, including amendments for the tendering of TV Licence fee collection. The proposed amendments are currently under Pre-Legislative Scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action & Environment and I look forward to receiving the Committee's Report on the matter.

In addition, I requested the Committee to examine the longer term issue of the future fund-

ing of public service media. The Committee published their report at the end of November 2017 and I intend to bring the matter to Government shortly.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 45.

Climate Change Policy

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the three most important actions he plans to take to address the issue of climate change and carbon reduction including development of the alternative energy sector and incentivising the transport sector to change to renewable fuels; the extent to which the domestic transport sector can be influential in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7415/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development sets out an ambitious long-term commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in Ireland by at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and in parallel, to pursue an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Under the Paris Agreement, the EU has committed, on behalf of its Member States, to a reduction of at least 40% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, to be achieved by reductions in the Emission Trading System (ETS) sector of 43% and in the non-ETS sector of 30%. Ireland's contribution to the overall 30% reduction in the non-ETS sector by 2030, as well as the contributions to be made by other Member States, will be established in the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR), which will replace the current Effort Sharing Decision. In December 2017, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the proposed ESR and I expect that this agreement to be shortly formally endorsed by both the European Parliament and Council. This provisional agreement sets a target of a 30% reduction in Ireland's 2005 emissions by 2030, with a starting point of May 2019, based on average emissions over the period 2016 to 2018.

Official inventories of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are prepared annually by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The most recent data, for the year 2015, is available on the EPA's website at: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghgemissions/>.

According to this data, the breakdown of emissions by sector in 2015 is as follows:

Sector	Mt CO ₂ eq.	% of total 2015 emissions
Agriculture	19.81	33.1%
Transport	11.83	19.8%
Energy Industries	11.80	19.8%
Residential	6.04	10.1%
Manufacturing Combustion	4.55	7.6%
Industrial Processes	1.99	3.3%
F-Gases	1.14	1.9%
Commercial Services	0.94	1.6%
Waste	0.97	1.6%

Sector	Mt CO ₂ eq.	% of total 2015 emissions
Public Services	0.81	1.3%
Total ETS	16.84	28%
Total Non-ETS	43.04	72%
Total for all sectors	59.88	100%

The latest EPA report on greenhouse gas emissions, published on 27 November, indicates that Ireland complied with its annual limits in the period 2013-2016. However, EPA projections indicate that Ireland is expected to exceed its annual limits from 2017 onwards, and that emissions could be between 4% and 6% below 2005 levels by 2020, and between 1% and 3% below 2005 levels by 2030. The projected shortfall to our targets in 2020 reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. It is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis. In the light of this, Ireland's 2030 target will present a very significant challenge.

As a means of addressing this challenge, I published Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan last July. It provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A key objective of the Plan is to close the gap to Ireland's 2020 EU target and to prepare for the EU targets that Ireland will take on for 2030. The Plan sets out over 70 individual mitigation measures and 106 related actions to reduce emissions in the four sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions (Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use). Action across all sectors will be paramount to building the foundations for Ireland's low carbon transformation considering the cross-cutting nature of the climate challenge.

Although the Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve either Ireland's proposed 2030 target or the 2050 transition objective, it begins the process of developing medium-to-long-term policy options so as to achieve progressive emissions reductions in each of the four key sectors, and to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

It is important to note that the National Mitigation Plan is a living document that will be updated as on-going analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. This continuous review process reflects the broad and evolving nature of the sectoral challenges outlined in the Plan, coupled with the continued development and deployment of emerging low carbon and cost effective technologies across different sectors of the economy.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 26.

Broadband Service Provision

69. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of broadband to areas in the south west of County Dublin that are currently lacking in broadband (details supplied); if the matter will be addressed in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7268/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today

7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection.

In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of this year as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me last April.

There are approximately 58,000 premises in the constituency of Dublin South-West. Nearly 600 (1%) fall within the AMBER area and will be covered under the State led Intervention. More than 57,500 (98%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be covered by commercial providers. Less than 1% of premises in Dublin South-West are LIGHT BLUE.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the sse/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

I recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland and fully appreciate the frustration felt by people, such as those in Dublin South-West, who do not currently have access to this level of connectivity. The vital broadband connections these people need to live, work and learn will be delivered by the National broadband Plan.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website which is available at <http://www.ruralireland.ie/policies/national-broadband-plan/>.

Fish Farming

70. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the work of his Department and agencies under its aegis on ensuring investment in fish farms by Inland Fisheries Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7262/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), that following a positive and constructive meeting of its Fish Farming Working Group, the production supply of fish will continue throughout 2018, and thereafter.

The Fish Farming Working Group is comprised of members of Inland Fisheries Ireland's Board and Executive, as well as the two main trout angling organisations in Ireland.

The Board of IFI has already confirmed its commitment to developing a comprehensive strategy to meet current and future trout production needs, subject to securing the investment required, and have agreed to proceed with a tender process for this project.

The future success and development of the sector depends on the close co-operation and constructive approach of both IFI and the stakeholders. The fact that the Fish Farming Working Group has begun 2018 with such a positive meeting is very much to be welcomed and I look forward to ongoing productive dialogue in the future.

I also welcomed the Group's discussions, in the context of the future advancement of the sector, on the wider development of youth angling generally and the potential for developing urban angling locations.

Departmental Policy Reviews

71. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to commission a study to examine the feasibility of the re-nationalisation of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7480/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I assume the Deputy is referring to the ownership of eir in the context of recent discussions on the State led intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

As the Deputy is aware, Eir is a privately owned company operating in a fully liberalised commercial market since 1999. It is regulated by the independent Commission for Telecommunications Regulation, ComReg. I have no statutory role or function in relation to the commercial decisions of any of the private operators in the market, including eir.

I have no plans to commission a study of the nature referred to by the Deputy.

Exploration Licences Data

72. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the new applications to his Department that are pending a decision or for which a decision has been made for a licence, undertaking or lease for the exploration and so on of petroleum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7483/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): With regard to applications for petroleum authorisations, the Irish Offshore is divided into 'Open Areas' and 'Closed Areas'. In Open Areas, such as the Celtic

and Irish Seas, applications for licensing options or exploration licences may be made at any time. In Closed Areas such as the Atlantic Margin, applications for licensing options or exploration licences may only be made during a Licensing Round. The Irish Onshore is also closed for applications. Lease undertakings and petroleum leases represent follow-on authorisations to an exploration licence.

In respect of applications for a new petroleum authorisation, two applications for licensing options in the Celtic Sea are currently under consideration.

In respect of applications for a follow-on authorisation to an existing authorisation, twelve applications to convert existing licensing options awarded under the 2015 Atlantic Margin Licensing Round to frontier exploration licenses are under consideration. In addition, three applications to convert an existing exploration licence to a lease undertaking are also under consideration. There are no applications on hand for a petroleum lease.

Details of all petroleum authorisations granted are published on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie on a quarterly basis. In addition, I am required to lay before the Oireachtas under the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960 half yearly reports detailing all petroleum exploration authorisations granted during the period of the report. The last such report under this Act was in respect of the six-month period ending 31 December 2017.

Post Office Network

73. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date by which he will publish An Post's strategic plan for the future of the post office network; if he is satisfied with the implementation of the An Post business network development group report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7466/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Strategic Plan referred to in the Question is An Post's Strategic Plan and publication of same is a matter for An Post. Government was briefed on the plan in November last.

The strategic plan harnesses the company's existing strengths such as its nationwide reach, trusted brand and the relationship of postmasters with communities, both rural and urban. At the same time, An Post has recognised that it must embrace the digital agenda and this is reflected in the plan, especially in the emphasis on growing the parcels business. In line with the recommendations of the Post Office Network Business Development Group Report, enhanced banking services are becoming available through the post office network with the smart bank account. Government has also committed to exploring the potential for extra Government business, including motor tax, to be channelled through the network and my Department is engaging with other relevant Government Departments in this regard. In addition an initiative called "Digital Assist" will use the local post office as a digital gateway for Government business and will be initially rolled out as a pilot initiative across the country.

Discussions on the future of the post office network are a matter for An Post and the Irish Postmasters Union. I understand discussions are ongoing between both parties and I continue to encourage the parties to work closely to find an agreed solution to the renewal of the network. I understand that these discussions are to, among other things, take account of the recommendations of the Post Office Network Business Development Group.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

74. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the significant number of households and businesses waiting on the national broadband plan in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath and of the negative impacts this is having on daily lives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7420/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am very much aware that there are significant numbers of homes, businesses, farms and schools throughout the country awaiting connection to high speed broadband and I understand peoples frustration and the challenges they face in this regard. As I have said many times, delivering high speed broadband to each of these premises is a personal commitment from me and remains a key priority of Government. The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland now have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This will be achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

The High Speed Broadband Map on my Department's website <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/high-speed-broadband-map/Pages/Interactive-Map.aspx> is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of this year as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department last April.

The following table outlines the number of premises in Cavan, Monaghan and Meath which fall into these categories.

County Name	Total Premises	AMBER % Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	BLUE % Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE premises planned rural deployment
Cavan	41,990	16,938(40%)	18,812(45%)	6,240(15%)
Monaghan	32,939	15,654(47%)	13,769(42%)	3,516(11%)
Meath	83,572	19,222(23%)	56,679(68%)	7,671(9%)

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage and when the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in re-

spect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

National Broadband Plan Implementation

75. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of his commitment to provide high speed broadband to each house and business in County Donegal; the deadline for same; the number of homes and business which have access to high speed broadband; the number of additional homes and businesses which received access to high speed broadband in 2017; the number which will receive access in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7333/18]

78. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the impact that a company (details supplied) pulling out of the national broadband plan tender process will have on the commitment to provide high speed broadband to every house and business in County Donegal; the number of homes and businesses which currently have access to high speed broadband; the number of homes and businesses which received access to high speed broadband in 2017; the number which will receive access in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7298/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 78 together.

Delivering high speed broadband to every home, every business, every farm and every school in Ireland is a personal commitment for me and remains a key priority of Government.

Currently just over 55,000 or 55% of the approximately 101,000 premises in County Donegal have access to a high speed broadband service. Every single one of the remaining 46,000 (46%) premises that lack this service will be served under the Government's National Broadband Plan; some 12,000 by commercial investment, the remaining 34,000 by the planned State led intervention.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has reconfirmed this commitment to completing the rollout by the end of this year. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fiberrollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. In the period to Q3 2017, over 14,100 premises in County Donegal were passed by eir's rural deployment.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Although deployment figures for Q4 2017 have not yet been verified by my Department's teams, I understand eir has passed a national total of 121,000 premises of the 300,000 eircodes identified by eir.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to engage the company who will rollout a new high speed broadband network to those premises in the State intervention area who will not be covered by private investment. My Department's specialist NBP procurement team

will continue to engage intensively with all the relevant stakeholders in the process, including the sse/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to every home, farm and business across the country. My Department will also engage with the bidder to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of any contract.

When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence. Through the said combination of commercial investment and State led intervention the National Broadband Plan has already provided a high speed broadband connection to thousands of homes around the country, ensuring that today, 7 out of 10 Irish premises can access this vital service. By the end of this year this will be almost 8 out of 10 and by 2020, 9 out of every 10 premises in this country will have a high speed broadband connection.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

76. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the new climate action offices and the way in which they plan to interact with local communities to mitigate against climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7472/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Adaptation Framework, which I launched in Sligo on 19 January 2018, sets out the context to ensure Local Authorities, regions and key sectors can assess the risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making.

As a key action under the Framework, I also announced a funding commitment from my Department of €10 million over 5 years to establish four Local Authority Regional Climate Action Offices. This commitment recognises the significant obligation which has been placed on Local Government to develop and implement its own climate action measures, as well as the need to build capacity within the sector to engage effectively with climate change.

The Regional Climate Action Offices will be operated by a lead Local Authority in four different regions grouped according to shared climate change risks. The establishment of these offices will enable a more coordinated engagement across the whole of government and will help build on the experience and expertise which exists across the sector.

Through these offices the Local Authorities can play a crucial role in driving practical policy and behavioural changes within our communities to encourage both businesses and citizens to embrace the need for climate action. In addition, I also see the Regional Climate Action Offices as having a key role in helping to facilitate the National Dialogue on Climate Action at both regional and local level. The regional structure being established can provide a leadership role through, for example, Public Participation Networks, community groups, Local Enterprise Offices and environmental awareness programmes, to advance informed discussions across all areas of the national climate agenda.

Local Authorities, through the regional structure, are also very well placed to help future-proof our cities, towns and counties as the global climate changes. In this regard Local Government has a central role in implementing the new National Planning Framework and National Development Plan (through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies), which will help set

our communities on a more sustainable pathway over the coming decades so as to ensure we achieve a low carbon and climate resilient future.

My Department is currently engaging with the Local Government Management Agency and regional lead authorities to advance the process in terms of establishing this regional structure as efficiently and effectively as possible, while also ensuring that proper oversight and governance arrangements are put in place for the years to come.

Post Office Network

77. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the interaction he has had with an organisation (details supplied) on the future sustainability of the post office network. [7341/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I am responsible for the postal sector including the governance of An Post. Operational matters relating to the company's retail business, including the post office network, are matters for the Board and management of An Post. Nonetheless, I am acutely conscious of the value placed by communities in both rural and urban areas on services provided by post offices and am concerned to ensure the needs of those communities continue to be met. Government remains fully committed to a sustainable post office network which is a key piece of economic and social infrastructure for both rural and urban areas. Reflecting its commitment to sustaining a nationwide post office network and daily mails service, the Government recently made €30m available in State funding to An Post to support the renewal of the post office network and the continued fulfilment of a 5 day per week mails delivery service.

Discussions on the future of the post office network are a matter for An Post and the Irish Postmasters Union and I understand negotiations are ongoing between both parties. I have had engagement with both parties and I continue to encourage the parties to work closely to find an agreed solution to the renewal of the network.

I met with the IPU on the 10 April and 5 October 2017 and was interested to hear their perspective on how to renew what continues to be a very valuable resource for both urban and rural communities.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 75.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

79. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he plans to proceed with the national adaptation framework to reduce the negative effects of climate change. [7344/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Adaptation Framework (NAF), which I launched on 19 January 2018, sets out the context to ensure Local Authorities, regions and key sectors can assess the risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making.

The Framework does not identify specific locations or propose adaptation measures or projects in relation to sectors. Respecting the principle of subsidiarity, detailed adaptation measures

will be developed across sectors and Local Government.

Under the Framework, seven Government Departments (or Agencies, where appropriate) with responsibility for twelve priority sectors are required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in line with the requirements of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and the policies laid out in the Framework.

Local understanding is also crucial to getting adaptation right and in this regard Local Authorities will be preparing their own adaptation strategies under the Framework. In publishing the Framework last month I also announced a funding commitment from my Department of €10 million over five years to establish four Local Authority Regional Climate Action Offices. This will underpin a risk-based approach to climate action at the local and regional level, and will provide a coherent and coordinated response to climate change, both in terms of adaptation and mitigation. The Regional Climate Action Offices will be operated by a lead Local Authority in four different regions grouped according to shared climate change risks.

Ireland already has a number of resources in place to assist with adaptation planning, including an online resource and guidelines for both key sectors and Local Authorities. Under the Framework the guidelines will be strengthened to support Local Authorities and sectors in preparing their adaptation strategies and plans respectively so as to ensure that a coherent and consistent approach to adaptation planning is adopted at national, regional and local levels.

In addition, and again under the Framework, I will be putting in place arrangements so as to further develop the online climate information platform, Climate Ireland, which provides tools to assist both sectors and Local Authorities in planning and prioritising adaptation actions. While the platform will provide operational support to the key sectors concerned, it will also serve as an educational and awareness resource for the private sector and civil society who also have a key role to play in enabling our climate resilient transition.

Adaptation planning is an iterative process with the NAF and the Sectoral Plans prepared under it to be reviewed at least once every five years in line with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. This will ensure that we adopt a dynamic approach to adaptation planning which is informed by the latest scientific evidence thus enabling Departments, Agencies and Local Authorities to modify or escalate adaptation actions as appropriate.

This week government will publish our new National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan, both of which are critically important to how we implement the NAF. Climate proofing our spatial planning processes and recognising the investments required to achieve climate resilience are key objectives under the NAF and this Government and my Department are committed to seeing that these objectives are met.

In the coming weeks I will be returning to Government to get approval for requesting the key sectors to start preparing their respective adaptation plans, thus initiating another key step in developing a whole-of-Government approach to how we will achieve climate resilience under this new statutory NAF.

Nuclear Waste

80. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on reports from Britain that the disposal of nuclear waste is being proposed on the island of Ireland; and his further views on this possible measure. [7404/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): There are presently no proposals to site a geological disposal facility for radioactive or nuclear waste on the island of Ireland. Following previous unsuccessful attempts to identify a long-term geological disposal facility, the United Kingdom's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has launched a consultation paper on how to better engage and represent communities across England and Northern Ireland in any future process to consider siting a geological disposal facility. The consultation paper notes that "the process to identify and select a site for a geological disposal facility requires detailed technical work that is estimated to take around 15 to 20 years".

Even if a community proposal won public support in Northern Ireland, the final decision on whether there should be a geological disposal facility for radioactive waste there would be a decision for the Northern Ireland Executive as a whole, taking into account planning and environmental considerations.

The United Kingdom-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters, comprising officials from United Kingdom and Irish Government Departments, and scientific agencies responsible for ensuring radiological safety, meet biannually to discuss matters of interest to both parties, including existing and planned installations, transport of radiological materials, and long-term strategies to safely store radiological and nuclear waste. Ireland will engage on this matter through this Group and continue to monitor developments in this area.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 42.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

82. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the threat of offshore island depopulation and the need for high speed broadband to curtail this trend through new employment opportunities for offshore island dwellers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7410/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland including those on our offshore islands.

I recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland and fully appreciate the frustration felt by people, including those across Ireland's islands, who do not currently have access to this level of connectivity. The vital broadband connections these people need to live, work and learn will be delivered by the National Broadband Plan, and more specifically in relation to Ireland's inhabited islands, via the State led intervention.

My Department is continuing the formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area and the procurement process is now at an advanced stage.

Delivering high speed broadband to citizens across Ireland remains my firm commitment and that of the Government.

The practical issue of rollout across the country as a whole will be an important factor in the final contract negotiations between my Department's specialist procurement team and the Preferred Bidder.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the

Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website which is available at <http://www.ruralireland.ie/policies/national-broadband-plan/>.

Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group

83. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of his Department's review of the functioning of the household waste collection system; the date by which he will provide an independent regulator for this market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7470/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have established a Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group (PMG) to monitor the rates charged by household waste collectors and to date the PMG has met on five separate occasions, 13 September, 11 October, 14 November, 12 December and 9 January 2018, and has considered four months of pricing data trends. Statements by the PMG have been released on a monthly basis since November 2017 and are available on my Department's website, as are details of the role and membership of the group and the market analysis of the cost of household waste collection carried out by the group in December 2017.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is an independent statutory body with a dual mandate to enforce competition and consumer protection law in Ireland. The CCPC is conducting a separate study on the operation of the household waste collection market. The CCPC has indicated that it hopes to finalise the study in 2018.

The results from the PMG will be monitored and analysed and in conjunction with the study being undertaken by the CCPC will provide an evidence base regarding the future monitoring or the potential need for additional regulation of the waste market.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

84. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the solutions he and the agencies under his remit have in place to tackle unemployment in rural areas in view of further delays with the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7258/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This will be achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

I fully recognise the importance of availability of high speed broadband connectivity to employment in rural Ireland and appreciate the frustration felt by people in rural areas who do not currently have access to this level of connectivity.

My Department is continuing the formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area and the procurement process is now at an advanced stage.

Delivering high speed broadband to citizens across Ireland remains my firm commitment and that of the Government.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

National Broadband Plan Implementation

85. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for full implementation of the national broadband plan in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7398/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will deliver high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to 100% of premises in Ireland.

Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. Since this Government came into office almost 400,000 additional premises have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

There are just under 32,000 premises in County Wexford which do not currently have access to a high speed broadband connection. Of these, over 10,000 will receive a high speed broadband connection via commercial investment by the end of 2018 under eir's ongoing 300k rural deployment, while the remaining circa 21,500 will be served via the planned State led intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage. The NBP procurement team in my Department will continue to engage intensively with all the relevant stakeholders in the process, including the sse/enet consortium which has reaffirmed its commitment to the procurement process. My Department will continue to engage with the bidder to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

Based on the momentum of the eir rollout, I expect that the company that delivers the State

led intervention, when it is up and running, can reach the vast majority of premises in the intervention area within 3 years of the commencement of rollout.

Delivering high speed broadband to every citizen in Wexford and every other county remains my firm commitment and that of the Government.

Waste Management Regulations

86. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the cost of road impact and other impacts locally are factored into a company's licence in the context of licensing for landfills; if the amount and-or sum due for the provision of road impact is paid to the local authority; the amount by percentage that is factored into the cost of the licence for road and-or other impacts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7247/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Licensing) Regulations 2004 govern the process under which waste licences are applied for and maintained. Once granted, each waste licence defines the nature of environmentally acceptable activities that can take place at a waste facility, including the acceptable types of waste that can be received. This is done by the conditions of the licence which are set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

It is a strategic objective of the Agency to ensure that sites with significant closure and after-care costs, or with the potential for high liabilities arising from incidents, make financial provision to cover these liabilities. To that end, the Agency secures financial provision for liabilities at licensed facilities, including waste facilities, using a range of financial instruments including secured funds, bonds, parental company guarantees and insurance policies. The attachment of conditions relating to individual community gain funds to planning permissions is a matter for the statutory planning authorities and do not fall under my remit as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 62.

Electric Vehicles

88. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that there are adequate eCars public charging points available; if not, his plans to increase the number of public charging points across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7475/18]

90. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of eCars public charging points available; his plans to increase the number of public charging points across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7476/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 90 together.

The ESB, through its eCars programme, rolled out an extensive public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs). There are approximately 900 EV charge points in Ireland of which circa 70 are rapid chargers. A map showing eCars public charge points is available on the ESB's website at www.esb.ie/ecars. In addition to the charge points installed by ESB eCars,

car manufacturers are also becoming increasingly involved in the provision of charging infrastructure. I understand that Nissan has a number of charge points available through its dealer network and Tesla provides charge points for its vehicles at two locations in Co. Laois and Co. Tipperary. In addition, Lidl Ireland has installed chargepoints in a number of its car parks.

The National Policy Framework on the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland: 2017 to 2030 states that Ireland's current EV charging network infrastructure is ahead of current market demand. This is helped by Ireland's capability for home charging being greater than that of other countries with approximately 80% of EV owners charging at home. However, it is imperative that the future development of the EV public charging progresses alongside the growth of Electric Vehicles.

In Budget 2018 I secured additional funding to support both public and home charging. A new grant scheme is now available to support the purchase and installation of home chargers and €1.8 million has been allocated to support public charging. The Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce, which is co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is considering a range of options for effective and efficient EV charging. The key objectives are supporting the operation of the existing charging network and facilitating the expansion of the network, with a particular focus on increasing the number of fast chargers. The Taskforce held a stakeholder workshop in November 2017 to explore issues related to the future requirements for the public charging infrastructure. This workshop included representatives of EV owners, the motor industry, local authorities and other key stakeholders. Valuable feedback was provided which will assist the Taskforce in devising a sustainable policy framework for effective and efficient electric vehicle charging.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 26.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 88.

Gender Recognition

91. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public for dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; and if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015. [7576/18]

The Taoiseach: The delivery of effective, quality customer service is a priority for my Department and forms an integral part of my Department's Strategy Statement, Corporate Governance Framework and the business plans of individual Divisions within the Department. While my Department is primarily engaged in policy development and does not have the same level of contact with citizens as other Departments, staff in the Department of the Taoiseach endeavour to provide a high level of service to all citizens who they interact with.

My Department is also committed to protecting dignity and respect of all its employees and to maintaining a positive working environment. As part of my Department's induction process, all employees are asked to read 'Dignity at Work - An anti bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy for the Irish Civil Service'. This document was developed in partnership between the Civil Service management and the staff panel of unions. The key aims of this policy are to achieve a work environment where dignity and respect are to the forefront of our values and to ensure that each individual is aware of his/her responsibility to behave in a way that reflects a culture of dignity and respect. Training on unconscious bias is also provided for

staff in my Department.

While my Department has not prepared written guidelines for staff and the public in dealing specifically with transgender matters, my Department's policies on customer service and dignity at work are designed to ensure that customers and employees of the Department are treated at all times with dignity and respect.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is leading on the review of the Gender Recognition Act and has appointed a Review Group comprising stakeholder groups and relevant departments. While my Department is not directly involved at this stage of the process, it will support the cross-departmental work through the Cabinet Committee structure as required.

Data Protection

92. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; and if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing in respect of the GDPR. [7653/18]

The Taoiseach: My Department is working to ensure it is well prepared for the implementation of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May. A Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been appointed and Divisions throughout the Department are currently reviewing what personal data is received and how it is managed and stored by the Department. We are also seeking to identify any gaps in the management of data and consider any improvements in order to reduce the risk of a possible data breach.

A number of staff including the DPO, have already attended training sessions on the GDPR, which have also covered the new provisions for timely responses to Special Access Requests (SARs) received in the Department. In addition, the Department has held a number of briefing sessions on the GDPR for staff in key areas (e.g. Human Resources, Finance and IT). We propose to extend training to more staff as the year progresses.

Gender Recognition

93. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public for dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7566/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A Civil Service wide Dignity at Work policy was developed in 2015 in partnership between Civil Service management and staff unions throughout the Equality Sub Committee of General Council. This policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety and equality in the workplace and advises that every member of staff has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner. The policy was rolled out to all Department of Defence staff in 2015.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which has responsibility for Civil Service Human Resources policy, has not issued guidelines in relation to transgender matters and

my Department does not have a stand-alone policy in this area.

Data Protection

94. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing in respect of the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7643/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence has begun preparations to ensure compliance and accountability with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). As part of these preparations a Data Protection Officer has been appointed and a Working Group with representatives across all branches of the Department has been established. The Working Group is overseen by a newly established Data Protection Steering Committee. The Department is currently engaged in a data mapping exercise and a review of data protection policies. A number of staff have undertaken GDPR training to date and further GDPR training will be rolled out across the Department between late February and April 2018.

Defence Forces Data

95. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of soldiers billeted by the Army; the locations of same; and his views on same. [7793/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The number of bed places currently available for use by military personnel at each of the permanently occupied military locations is shown in the table. This accommodation is generally referred to as Single Living In accommodation and the overall provision of such accommodation is based on military operational requirements. The number of personnel actually billeted at any one time varies according to such operational requirements.

Location	Total Number Of Beds Available For Use
1st Brigade	
Collins Bks, Cork	227
Dún UiMhaoilfosa Bks, Galway	184
Sarsfield Bks, Limerick	133
Stephens Bks, Kilkenny	133
2nd Brigade	
Aiken Bks, Dundalk	180
Cathal Brugha Bks, Dublin	356
Custume Bks, Athlone	234
Finner Camp, Donegal	190
Gormanston Camp, Meath	134
McKee Bks, Dublin	249
St Bricin's Hospital, Dublin	12
Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel	201
DFTC, Curragh Camp	970

Location	Total Number Of Beds Available For Use
Naval Base, Haulbowline, Cork	222
Total	3,425

Passport Applications

96. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of a passport application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7559/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the terms of the Passports Act, 2008 (“the Act”), which provides the legal basis for the policies and practices that are applied by the Passport Service.

Section 7 of the Act requires that the Minister be satisfied as to an individual’s identity before issuing an Irish passport to that person and authorises the Minister to request such information and documentary evidence as may be required to establish and verify an applicant’s identity. Appropriate photographic identification is one of the requirements in cases in which a person seeks to replace a lost, stolen or damaged passport. This and other requirements are necessary to protect the integrity of the Irish passport and protect against fraud and identity theft.

The Passport Service has confirmed that a passport application from the person in question has been received, requesting issue of a new passport to replace a lost passport. The applicant seeks issue of this passport in a new name, which differs both from the applicant’s birth name and also from the name in which the applicant was last issued with a passport. The Passport Service has advised the applicant of the documentation required to allow the matter to be considered. To date, the applicant has not supplied the required documentation.

Gender Recognition

97. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public for dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7570/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department performs a wide range of functions in serving Irish citizens, both at home and abroad. These include front-line consular and passport services to citizens and communities.

In relation to transgender, Section 11 of the Passports Act 2008, as amended, provides for the issuing of a passport in a new gender and, if applicable, in a new name to applicants producing a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) provided by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The Passport Service provides training to staff on these sensitive cases and has written guidelines for processing applications. Information on the documents required for a passport in a new gender are available on the Passport Service website at www.dfa.ie/passports-citizenship/top-passport-questions/documentary-requirements-passport-applications. My Department also works closely with the Transgender Equality Network Ireland, including to ensure that clarifications on any passport-related matter are provided promptly.

Following the enactment of the Gender Recognition of Foreign Births Regulations in December 2017, the Global Irish Services Division of my Department launched the Register of Gender Recognition of Foreign Births. The introduction of the Register allows Irish citizens who have obtained citizenship through Foreign Births Registration to be recorded under their preferred gender and name. As part of that initiative, staff working in the Foreign Births Registration Unit of the Department were briefed on the new Regulations, as well as on transgender issues more widely.

Separately, my Department is participating in the ongoing review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015.

Within my Department, a Sub-Committee of the Management Board on Gender Equality, Equality and Diversity was established in 2016 to support an inclusive and diverse working environment. The Committee is chaired by two members of the Management Board. The initiative works to foster a culture of respect and equality to benefit the Department, its staff and ultimately the citizens that we serve. The focus of the Sub-Committee is the Department's treatment of the grounds for discrimination in employment equality law. Significant progress has been made on a number of Departmental initiatives to address barriers to equality in our work place and in service provision.

The Sub-Committee, in cooperation with the Human Resources Unit and other sections, runs regular events to celebrate and support equality and diversity at home and through our Mission network overseas.

Data Protection

98. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing in respect of the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7647/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department commenced preparations for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in mid-2016, with the appointment of a Data Protection Officer, who holds a professional qualification in data protection. The Data Protection Officer has overseen and delivered a suite of data protection training across the Department, both at home and abroad.

At Headquarters, data protection training and GDPR information sessions were incorporated into the pre-posting training given to staff going on overseas assignments in 2017. In addition, the Data Protection Officer has provided in-depth GDPR-specific training to all staff who work in the Department's Human Resources team in Dublin and Limerick.

My Department's Global Irish Services (GIS) Division, which includes the Passport Service and Consular Services, holds a very significant bank of personal data. With oversight and guidance provided by the Data Protection Officer, the GIS Division established a working group in 2017 to oversee its preparations for GDPR. This includes the development of function-specific training and the development of the required compliance documentation. This work is at an advanced stage and training has commenced for staff in the Passport Service, including all temporary staff who are to be assigned during 2018.

Briefing on the implications of GDPR has been provided to a number of senior management groups within my Department and further training and ICT support tools will be rolled

out in the coming weeks. “Data champions” will shortly be appointed for each Division, to be responsible for overseeing compliance with data protection requirements and for co-ordinating the completion and maintenance of the required documentation.

My Department has staff serving in over eighty locations overseas and training on data protection and the implications of the GDPR for these staff commenced on a regional basis in mid-2017. The four regions covered were Central Europe, South Eastern Europe, the Americas and Asia. Further training is envisaged this year in Africa, the Northern Baltic region and Latin America.

Passport Applications

99. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if passport applications can be made following the issuing of a gender recognition certificate without requiring a person to wait until their current passport expires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7690/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A passport application may be submitted at any stage following the issuing of a gender recognition certificate. It is not necessary for a person to wait until their current passport expires.

In such cases, a fully completed passport application form is required, together with the applicant’s current passport, gender recognition certificate and birth certificate as re-issued after gender recognition and all other relevant documents as for a first-time adult application. The standard application fee will apply.

Additional information on the documentary requirements for passport applications and other frequently asked questions is available on the Passport Service website www.dfa.ie/passport.

Gender Recognition

100. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7569/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, on 4 September 2015, the Gender Recognition Act 2015 came into effect and provides for the legal recognition of a person’s preferred gender.

Under the Civil Service Diversity Policy - A Policy of Equality of Opportunity, the Department of Finance is strongly committed to equality of opportunity in all its employment practices. As an employer, the Department must fulfil its obligations under equality legislation, particularly the Employment Equality Act 1998-2015.

The Employment Equality Act 1998-2015, outlaws discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These include recruitment and promotion; equal pay; working conditions; learning opportunities - whether on the job or formal training; dismissal and harassment including sexual harassment.

In 2015, the Civil Service published its revised Dignity at Work Policy which was devel-

oped in partnership between the civil service management and staff unions. The revised policy which applies to staff of the Department of Finance, aims to promote respect, dignity, safety and equality in the workplace. Every member of staff should be aware that all forms of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment are unacceptable and every member of staff has a duty to behave in an acceptable and respectful manner.

As part of the revised policy a new role of Designated Person and Contact person were introduced. The contact person is someone who is available to listen and provide information to a staff member who may be concerned regarding bullying, harassment or sexual harassment in the workplace.

In addition the Civil Service Employment Service, CSEAS, is a neutral support service and provides a wide range of free and confidential supports to all employees of the Department.

Lastly, I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of Finance, has run unconscious bias training for staff and that during 2017 over 175 staff attended this training. The Department proposed to provide further opportunities for staff to attend unconscious bias training during 2018.

Data Protection

101. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and/or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7646/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which will take effect on 25 May 2018 places additional responsibilities on controllers and processors of personal data.

My Department is aware of its obligations under the GDPR and is taking appropriate measures to ensure compliance with the regulation. These measures include reviewing the personal data held in the Department and ensuring that it is processed lawfully, revising the Department's data protection internal policy and procedures, identifying areas where a data protection impact assessment is required, and continued participation at the interdepartmental committee on data issues, chaired by the Department of An Taoiseach, on cross-Departmental data protection issues.

I can advise the Deputy that my Department has assigned a data protection officer as required under article 37 of the GDPR. The Department's data protection officer has undergone accredited training in data protection. I can also advise the Deputy that my Department has recently held a number of training courses for the Department's staff on data protection and obligations under the GDPR.

Tax Code

102. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if a review will be undertaken of the interaction of the tax and social welfare codes to address the unfair treatment of cohabiting persons whereby a couple is assessed as a family unit for welfare purposes but assessed individually for tax purposes. [7694/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A review of the nature proposed by the Deputy is not currently planned as, to the extent that there are differences in the tax treatment of

the different categories of couples, such differences arise from the objective of dealing with different types of circumstances while at the same time respecting the constitutional requirements to protect the institution of marriage.

The basis for the current tax treatment of married couples derives from the Supreme Court decision in *Murphy vs Attorney General* (1980). This decision was based on article 41.3.1 of the Constitution where the State pledges to protect the institution of marriage. The decision held that it was contrary to the Constitution for a married couple, both of whom are working, to pay more tax than two single people living together and having the same income.

The personal tax credits and standard rate bands available to a married couple or a couple in a civil partnership are therefore equal in value to the personal tax credits and bands available to two individuals, with the difference being that one spouse's personal tax credit and a portion of his or her standard rate band may be transferred to their spouse if they so choose. This can be of benefit where one spouse has low income or does not work outside the home and therefore does not use their own credit and rate bands in full.

Where a couple is cohabiting, rather than married or in a civil partnership, each partner is treated for the purposes of income tax as a separate and unconnected individual. Each partner is entitled in his or her own right to the tax credits and standard rate band appropriate to a single person, but do not have the option to partially transfer their personal tax credit and/or rate band. Cohabitants do not have the same legal rights and obligations as a married couple or couple in a civil partnership, which is why they are not accorded similar treatment to couples who have a civil status that is recognised in law.

From a practical perspective, it would be very difficult to administer a tax regime for cohabitants which would be the same as that for married couples or civil partners. Married couples and civil partners have a verifiable official confirmation of their status. It would be difficult, intrusive and time-consuming to confirm declarations by individuals that they were actually cohabiting. It would also be difficult to establish when cohabitation started or ceased.

It should also be noted that, while there may be an advantage in tax legislation for a married couple or civil partners as regards the extended rate band and the ability to transfer credits, their legal status has wider consequences from a tax perspective both for the couple and for persons connected with them. To counter tax avoidance, special provisions often apply in respect of transactions between "connected persons" as defined throughout the various Tax Acts. The definition of "connected persons" usually extends to the relatives and children of a taxpayer's spouse or civil partner. Such provisions would be very difficult to prove and enforce in respect of persons connected with a taxpayer's cohabiting partner where the couple has no legal recognition of their status as a couple.

NAMA Portfolio

103. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request NAMA to ensure a building (details supplied) will be kept as a historical heritage building for the local community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7700/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that I, as Minister for Finance, have no role in respect of NAMA's commercial operations or decisions. These are matters for NAMA, in accordance with its statutory independent commercial mandate.

However, in this instance, I am advised that NAMA has never had any involvement with

this particular property.

I would remind the Deputy that should she wish to raise any matter directly with the Agency, NAMA operates a dedicated email service for members of the Oireachtas, oir@nama.ie. This email is regularly monitored and Deputies will receive a prompt response.

Brexit Issues

104. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Finance the steps being taken by his Department and the Revenue Commissioners, including consultations with the EU Commission and UK government, to ensure that there is no disruption to cross-Border movements of excisable goods under duty suspension between here and Northern Ireland post-Brexit once the UK leaves the excise movement control system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7720/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The future arrangements that will apply to cross border movements of excisable goods will depend on the outcome of discussion on the future relationship between the EU and the UK. In accordance with EU rules, it will technically be the case that if such an agreement does not provide for UK participation in the EU excise movement control system, importers of excisable goods will still have the facility to import such goods from the UK with payment of excise duty suspended until the goods are released from the importer's excise warehouse.

National Development Plan

105. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the new national investment plan will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7765/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The new National Development Plan 2018 - 2027, NDP, is currently in the process of being finalised and I expect that it will be published following approval by Government on 16 February.

The primary objective of the NDP is to underpin the implementation of the new national planning framework for spatial policy under the Ireland 2040 Plan. The assessment of priorities for public capital investment over the period to 2027 will also be strongly informed by the detailed infrastructure capacity and demand analysis prepared by the Irish Government economic and evaluation service, IGEES, as part of the recent review of the 2015 capital plan, which assessed key drivers of infrastructure demand in a number of areas such as health, housing, transport, education, climate change, etc. The infrastructure capacity and demand analysis was published alongside the review of the capital plan and both are available on my Department's website.

The NDP will set out the Government's priorities in relation to public capital investment for the next decade and it will be a priority for Government to ensure that the plan constitutes a decisive response to priority infrastructural needs across key sectors of the economy, while also supporting balanced regional growth.

106. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Iveagh Gardens are a protected structure. [7792/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Iveagh Gardens are a protected structure. Their reference in Dublin City Council's Record of Protected Structures in Dublin City is 7791. The description for this listing is as follows: "Iveagh House (Department of Foreign Affairs) and Iveagh Gardens, including stone garden folly."

Flood Risk Management

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to deal with issues arising based on scientific evidence available on the full extent of climate change alleviation projects needed to address the issues of flooding throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7803/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): It is expected that climate change will impact on flood risk in Ireland resulting in rising sea levels and increased risk to our coastal communities and assets. The incidents of wetter winters and the number of heavy rainfall days per year are both projected to increase, giving rise to greater risk from river and urban storm water flooding.

While there is considerable uncertainty associated with most aspects of the potential impacts of climate change on flood risk (e.g. how fast sea levels will continue to rise into the future), the OPW considered that it was prudent to take the potential for climate change into account in the development of proposed measures in the Catchment Flood Risk Management (CFRAM) Programme.

One of the main objectives of the CFRAM Programme has been to assess the existing flood risk and also the potential for significant increases in this risk in the future, including due to climate change.

Therefore the OPW's CFRAM Programme took into account the assessment of risk for two potential future scenarios, the:

- Mid-Range Future Scenario - increase in rainfall of 20% and sea level rise of 500mm (20 inches), and

- High-End Future Scenario - increase in rainfall of 30% and sea level rise of 1,000 mm (40 inches).

In this way, the assessment of potentially feasible proposed measures to be outlined the Flood Risk Management Plans have taken into account how they might cope with the potential impact of climate change. The specific adaptation strategy for each proposed measure can be assessed when the measures are developed in further detail at a project-level.

In general, flood relief schemes in the OPW's current Capital Programme are designed to be adaptable in the future for climate change. Some defences are constructed with an inbuilt allowance for climate change where it might be difficult or costly to undertake works in the future while others are built without an allowance but can be extended in the future to take account of climate change.

Gender Recognition

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public in dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7574/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): DPER provides a welcoming and supportive environment to all employees and is committed to valuing all aspects of diversity and supporting an inclusive workforce as identified in our People@PER Strategy 2017 – 2020. Furthermore, the Department is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation and our Dignity at Work Policy aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace.

My Department is also committed to reviewing and revising the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion policy – this is referenced in the Civil Service People Strategy and is action 18 under Building a Workforce of the Future. Work has commenced on this action and will continue during 2018.

Data Protection

109. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7651/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In common with other Government Departments, work is ongoing in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in preparation for the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which will take effect from 25 May, 2018. My Department is aware of its obligations under the GDPR and is taking appropriate measures to ensure compliance with the regulation. A number of staff have already attended GDPR training and seminars, and further training is being arranged for a wider cohort of staff in the coming weeks. My Department continues to participate in the Inter-Departmental Committee on Data Issues, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, on cross-Departmental data protection issues. Alongside this, a number of other steps are being taken to support GDPR compliance in the Department, including, for example, the revision of the Department's existing Data Protection Policy.

Flood Prevention Measures

110. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of planned dredging works on the Shannon river; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7705/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): In December 2016, the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group took a major decision to develop a plan for strategic maintenance works on the River Shannon to complement the Group's existing Work Programme.

A sub-committee of the Group was established to examine all of the necessary legal, environmental, technical and other considerations. The sub-committee identified a small number of areas where targeted maintenance would increase the conveyance capacity of the river.

During 2017, targeted maintenance works were carried out at Madden's Island, downstream of Banagher, to improve the conveyance capacity and navigation of the Shannon. Further works were due to be carried out this month however this has not been possible due to the high water level on the channel. This work will be carried out later this year during the next cutting season.

Following the receipt of consent in September 2017 from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, targeted works have been planned for a number of other locations for the appropriate seasonal windows. To date, work has been carried out at Muckinish and Shannon Grove (Kilnaborris), in accordance with the consent provided. Further work at these and other locations for which consent applies will be planned in terms of the seasonal restrictions that may apply to the types of activity required at each site.

Flood Risk Management

111. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the flood risk management plans developed under the catchment flood risk assessment and management programme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7764/18]

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

The CFRAM Programme focussed on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) including 90 coastal areas, mainly in urban locations nationwide, identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding. The proposed feasible measures, both structural and non-structural, identified for AFAs are outlined in the Flood Risk Management Plans.

The Draft Flood Risk Management Plans were published for public consultation in 2016 and a significant volume of submissions were received for consideration. In Summer 2017, the OPW finalised all Plans and each Plan was submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for an independent review of the environmental assessments. This independent review is expected to be completed this week, after which the Final Plans will be formally submitted to the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for approval, in accordance with the statutory requirements.

I would hope in the coming weeks to seek the approval from the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for the Flood Risk Management Plans developed under the CFRAM process.

School Accommodation

112. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for a decision regarding an application for funding for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7548/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional school accommodation.

I understand that since making the application, that enrolment numbers have decreased below the level required to retain the fourth mainstream class teacher. In the circumstances, the school has sufficient existing classroom accommodation to meet its current needs.

School Enrolments

113. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if sanction for a school (details supplied) to change its enrolment policy and move towards becoming co-educational will be expedited in view of the fact that the enrolment process is under way for future school years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7549/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has recently received correspondence from the school authority in question regarding a proposed change of the school's status from enrolling boys only to becoming co-educational.

My Department is currently liaising with the school Patron in this regard and will continue this engagement as part of the assessment process. My Department awaits further contact from the Patron in due course.

Schools Building Projects Status

114. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7550/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional school accommodation. A decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

Gender Recognition

115. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7567/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department recognises that schools should be safe and supportive environments for all students. In order to support schools in developing a positive whole-school approach the Department has produced a range

of guidance documents and has also supported the provision of guidance by civil society organisations. “Being LGBT in School – A Resource for Post-Primary Schools to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying and Support LGBT Students”, which was developed by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) with the support of the Department, provides guidance in relation to supporting LGBT students in schools. The resource, which is available on the Department’s website, includes a section that addresses the specific support needs of students who identify as transgender. The non-governmental organisation, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) provided advice and support to ensure that this information is both practical and respectful to the needs of young people who are transgender.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) Wellbeing Team have also developed a number of resources in the area of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in conjunction with representative groups. These resources, which are available at <http://sphe.ie/resources.aspx>, include guidance for teachers, schools and guidance counsellors on their role in supporting LGBT students. PDST also offer a specific 1 day Seminar on Gender and Sexual Orientation. This seminar is for teachers of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and RSE and explores the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people. Participants receive the ‘Growing Up LGBT’ resource and explore how to raise awareness through both the curriculum and at a whole school level.

In addition, inclusive education is a mandatory area of study in programmes of initial teacher education (ITE), The ITE graduate is required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the factors that promote and hinder learning, the impact of pupils’ backgrounds and identities on learning and the need to provide for the holistic development of the learner, particularly through differentiated approaches.

At the Department level, civil servants are subject to the terms of the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour which outlines that officials should treat members of the public and their peer workers with dignity and respect. At section 12 of the Code it specifically addresses the matter of relationships with colleagues and states the nine grounds that Civil Servants have a legal duty to ensure that they do not discriminate on as stated in the Equality Act. At this section there is specific reference made that an official cannot discriminate on the basis of gender and this includes transgender. When the Code was published it was circulated to all staff and they were requested to sign an undertaking that they had read the document. All new appointees are presented with a copy of the Code and have to sign a similar undertaking. In addition to this Civil servants are obliged to support the Civil Service Policy on harassment, sexual harassment and bullying and a copy of the Dignity at Work Policy can be viewed on the Department’s intranet site.

Finally, my Department is represented on the group that has been established by the Minister of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to review the Gender Recognition Act 2015. The Group, which is chaired by Moninne Griffith, Executive Director of BeLonG To, met for the first time in December 2017.

School Enrolments

116. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will receive guidance on an enrolment anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7591/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In relation to school admissions, parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available

the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department's website www.education.ie.

The Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718500.

Gender Equality

117. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of all gender discrimination proceedings involving female lecturers at NUI Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7625/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): NUI Galway is an autonomous body within the meaning of the Universities Act 1997. Under the Act, the University is an autonomous body for the purposes of staffing, appointments and dispute resolution in relation to personnel matters subject to the provisions of the Equal Status Acts 2010-2015 and other general employment legislation. Therefore, I am not in a position to comment on the status of any proceedings of the type referred to by the Deputy.

Data Protection

118. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and/or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7644/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has established a General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Readiness project. As part of this project my Department is currently undertaking work to ensure that it will be compliant with the GDPR.

In June 2017, my Department assigned an interim Data Protection Office (DPO) whose role is to inform and advise staff of my Department who carry out processing of personal data of their obligations pursuant to the GDPR and to other data protection provisions.

To date a number of information events on the GDPR have been held for the staff of my Department. My Department is currently assessing how best it can meet the training requirements of all of its staff in connection the GDPR.

My Department has also organised advanced training in data protection for example on

Data Projection Impact Assessments (DPIA) for a number of its staff. It is the intention of my Department to extend this training to other staff as the need arises.

Departmental Properties

119. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body that owns a building (details supplied) and its grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7657/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership. In common with other buildings of its kind, there is a charging lease in place on the property dated 21 January 1960 for 99 years to protect the State's investment in the property.

In circumstances where a property has ceased to be used as a school, and a request is received from the property owner to release the State's interest secured under a charging lease, such requests are considered in the context of the specific circumstances which pertain to the individual property.

I can confirm that my Department has not received a request from the property owners to release my interest in this property. Queries in relation to the property should be directed to the property owner in the first instance.

School Completion Programme

120. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils who completed the leaving certificate who commenced second level education in each of the years 2005 to 2012; the completion rates which these represent; the areas with the lowest completion rates in each of those years; the outcome of analysis undertaken on poor completion rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7683/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Second Level school completion rates are published by my Department in the annual report titled 'Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools'. These reports can be found on my Department's website at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/Other-Statistical-Reports.html>. In the most recently published data, 91.2% of students who entered secondary education in 2010 sat their Leaving Certificate.

Retention rates by area, from 1996 to 2010, are published by Administrative County, County, Region and Nationally. A detailed breakdown of the analysis is available on my Department's Education Statistics Database at: http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Key%20Indicators/Key%20Indicators_statbank.asp?SP=Key%20Indicators&Planguage=0&ProductID=DB_ED

This latest analysis of the 2010 cohort show particularly significant improvements in retention rates in schools in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) scheme. The gap in retention rates to Leaving Certificate between DEIS and non-DEIS schools continues to narrow, halving from 16.8% for the 2001 cohort to 8.5% for the 2010 cohort.

Across Europe the average number of adults aged 20-24 who have completed upper secondary education is 83.1%. We are significantly ahead of that figure at 93.6%, placing Ireland second highest across the 28 EU member states.

School Completion Programme

121. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve supports to help students remain in school and complete the leaving certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7684/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The School Completion Programme forms an integral part of Tusla's educational welfare service and has the aim of increasing the numbers of young people remaining in primary and second level education and in doing so improving the numbers of pupils who successfully complete Senior Cycle. The programme is a key support for schools under the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme. My Department has requested Tusla to contact the Deputy directly with further details regarding the School Completion Programme.

Schools Building Projects Status

122. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is examining proposals for building works at a school (details supplied) in view of the concern of the school community in this DEIS one area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7686/18]

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

The next stage involves the preparation of the project brief. This is part of the preparatory work required to facilitate the progression of the project into the architectural planning process and my Department will be in further contact with the school in this regard.

Schools Refurbishment

123. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his Department's contacts with the management of a school (details supplied) in respect of urgently required works; if funding will be made available for these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7687/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department contacted the principal of the school in question earlier this week to ascertain if cost estimates had been secured for the proposed insulation works. The principal advised that cost estimates are awaited from the school's Consultant and will be furnished to my Department when available. The matter will be considered further following receipt of response from the school.

Schools Data

124. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of schools that are planned based on demographic data for Swords and the surrounding area in view of the fact that schools are at capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7759/18]

125. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of schools that are planned based on demographic data for Balbriggan and the surrounding area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7760/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 124 and 125 together.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of the additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity with a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school(s).

The nationwide demographic exercises involving all school planning areas, including the areas referred to by the Deputy, at primary and post-primary level is ongoing at the moment and work in this regard is almost complete.

Teaching Qualifications

126. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of a new scheme which would involve the State paying the cost of a teaching qualification as reported in the media (details supplied); if a similar scheme is envisaged for primary level teaching qualifications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7771/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Additional investment has allowed the successful recruitment of over 5,000 additional teachers in the last two years. Since 2012/2013, there are 8,900 more teachers in our schools. No other part of the public service has seen this sort of growth, which is testament to the Government's commitment to, and the importance of education in, fulfilling our national ambitions.

The numbers of graduates from initial teacher education (ITE) programmes have also remained broadly constant. Over 8,000 primary and 7,800 second level teachers have graduated in the last five years and in 2018 it is estimated that approximately 1,870 primary and 1,523 post primary teachers will graduate.

However, I fully acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed about teacher supply.

Last month, I announced the suspension of restrictions on substitution limits for career breaks. Schools have also been reminded that, in considering career break applications, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers.

At post primary level, I have announced my intention to double the number of places on undergraduate courses for second level teachers, as well as a range of other policy interventions.

I intend shortly to establish a Teacher Supply Steering Group to develop a strategy for teacher supply. As part of its remit, the Group will consult with key stakeholders and will consider all options to achieve the increases in teacher supply needed to address shortages of substitute teachers at primary level and shortages of teachers of certain subjects at post primary level.

I will also ask the Teaching Council to review subject criteria and processes for assessing out of state qualifications and to engage more with graduate fairs, and final year students.

Naturalisation Applications

127. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on an application for citizenship. [7551/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 15 March 2017. Processing of this application is on-going, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

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

Gender Recognition

128. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public for dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7573/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection holds pri-

mary responsibility for transgender policy. This Department has not prepared specific written guidelines for staff or the public in dealing with transgender matters. Staff are trained to deliver an appropriate level of customer service and this training includes detailed training on all grounds of discrimination.

The Deputy may wish to know that officials are engaged in the review of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 being undertaken by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection which will inform us of any particular training needs in this regard.

Prison Staff

129. Deputy Jim O’Callaghan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the supports afforded to prison staff if a member of the Irish Prison Service is injured in the execution of their duties; and the method used to communicate these supports to staff. [7587/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that the Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan 2016 – 2018 sets out the four key actions for the Irish Prison Service, the first of which is Staff Support.

The Irish Prison Service has its own Employee Assistance Programme with 3 full-time national Employee Assistance Officers. At local prison level, staff have access to a network of almost fifty voluntary Staff Support Officers. This support network provides a confidential service offering information, advice and onward referrals on a wide range of personal and work-related issues. The Employee Assistance Programme plays a key role in supporting staff, particularly those who have been injured on duty.

In October 2016, the Irish Prison Service launched an Independent Counselling Service for staff, which is provided by Inspire Workplaces. This service is available to all staff and is free of charge. This is an important enhancement of the Irish Prison Service Employee Assistance Programme. This Counselling Service is completely confidential and is designed to assist employees in resolving personal or work-related concerns. It is a 24/7 Freephone helpline, with access to up to 6 counselling sessions for support covering a wide range of issues.

For the purpose of sick pay, absences that are deemed to be Occupational Injury or Disease related, are dealt with under Civil Service Circulars which allow for six months on full pay followed by six months on half pay. In 2015, the Director General sought and obtained sanction to introduce a Serious Physical Assault Scheme which allows that, in certain cases, full pay may be sanctioned up to a maximum of twelve months. This is a considerable benefit for the small number of staff affected. The Scheme which was introduced in July 2015 is an interim arrangement pending the completion by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform of a full review of Occupational Injury or Disease in the Public Service.

The Irish Prison Service is committed to strengthening the support that the Irish Prison Service provides for staff. The Irish Prison Service is introducing the CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) model of interventions, which has been endorsed by the State Claims Agency. CISM provides guidance to staff on how to manage and control stress and reduce or eliminate uncontrolled stress. CISM comprises of a continuum of care and targets the response of individuals and groups of individuals to traumatic events rather than the incident itself. It aims to minimise the emotional impact of critical incidents on staff, increase the resistance and resilience of staff to harmful stress and prevent the harmful effects on staff of these incidents by working with and supporting employees at the time of critical incidents.

Information on these supports is available through the Employee Assistance Programme

and a booklet for staff is available in all prisons and on the Irish Prison Service intranet. The responsibility for the Human Resource function in each prison and unit of the Irish Prison Service lies with the HR Governor and the HR office. It is the responsibility of the HR Governor to maintain supportive contact with staff members who have been injured in the course of their duties.

Prison Staff

130. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if guidance on entitlement to access the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal is notified to prison staff injured in the execution of their duties. [7588/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that information on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal and the other supports available to staff who have been injured on duty is available through the Irish Prison Service Employee Assistance Programme. A booklet for staff is available in all prisons and on the Irish Prison Service intranet.

Prison Service Staff

131. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons on long-term or permanent sick leave from the Irish Prison Service. [7589/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that there are currently 58 employees absent on long term sick leave. Long term sick leave in the Irish Prison Service is defined as instances where an employee is absent on sick leave for a continuous period of 92 days or more.

The Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan 2016 – 2018 sets out the four key actions for the Irish Prison Service, the first of which is Staff Support. The Irish Prison Service has its own Employee Assistance Programme with 3 full-time national Employee Assistance Officers. At local prison level staff have access to a network of almost fifty voluntary Staff Support Officers. This support network provides a confidential service offering information, advice and onward referrals on a wide range of personal and work-related issues. The Employee Assistance Programme plays a key role in supporting staff, particularly those who have been injured on duty.

In October 2016, the Irish Prison Service launched an Independent Counselling Service for staff, which is provided by Inspire Workplaces. This service is available to all staff and is free of charge. This is an important enhancement of the Irish Prison Service Employee Assistance Programme. This Counselling Service is completely confidential and is designed to assist employees in resolving personal or work-related concerns. It is a 24/7 Freephone helpline, with access to up to 6 counselling sessions for support covering a wide range of issues.

In February 2015, the Irish Prison Service launched its Accommodations (Rehabilitative/ Restricted Duties) Policy which provides workplace rehabilitation that supports and enables injured or sick employees to remain at or return to the workplace to continue the discharge of work duties. The objective of this policy is to facilitate an early return to work following a period of sickness absence where an employee may not be fit for a “full range of operational duties”. This rehabilitation period will be for a maximum of 3 months following receipt of medical advice from the Officer of the Chief Medical Officer.

Prison Regulations

132. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure regarding the official use of handcuffs within the Irish Prison Service; and if there are approved methods for same. [7590/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the official use of handcuffs within the Irish Prison Service (IPS) comes under Rule 65 of Prison Rules 2007.

I am further advised by my officials in the IPS that there are approved methods for such use. All staff are trained upon induction into the Service and refresher training is carried out periodically on a regular basis.

The use of handcuffs on prisoners escorted outside of prisons (appearance in court, hospital appointments) has been standardised in all prisons since 2017 and is utilised following risk assessments of each such escort.

Road Traffic Offences Data

133. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 67 and 72 of 6 February 2018, the number of persons that were tested at the 52,395 mandatory intoxicant testing checkpoints nationally during 2017; the number that were tested for drugs only, for alcohol only and for drugs and alcohol, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7598/18]

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 67 and 72 of 6 February 2018, the number of persons that were tested at the 52,395 mandatory intoxicant testing checkpoints nationally during 2017; the number that were tested for drugs only, for alcohol only and for drugs and alcohol, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7599/18]

135. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 67 and 72 of 6 February 2018, the number of persons that were tested at the 52,395 mandatory intoxicant testing checkpoints nationally during 2017; the number that were tested for drugs only, for alcohol only and for drugs and alcohol, by month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7600/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 to 135, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that 52,395 Mandatory Intoxicant Testing (MIT) checkpoints were conducted by An Garda Síochána following the commencement of the relevant legislation on 13 April last year to 31 December 2017, during which period 612 oral fluid tests were administered, 90 of which tested positive for the presence of drugs. Of those 90 positive tests, I am informed by the Garda authorities that 89 persons were arrested, with one person passing the subsequent impairment test, having initially tested positive. I am further advised by An Garda Síochána that these statistics are provisional, operational and subject to change and are valid as of 1 February 2018.

I have requested a Garda report in relation to the remaining statistics sought by the Deputy and I will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report.

Garda Data

136. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of crimes that were recorded in which the suspected offenders were on bail, in 2015, 2016 and 2017, by category of crime involved, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7603/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of the official recorded crime statistics. I have forwarded a copy of the Deputy's query to the CSO for direct reply in respect of the 2015 and 2016 figures.

The Deputy will be aware that the CSO has not yet published crime statistics for 2017 as there is a process ongoing to review Garda homicide statistics. However, I am advised that the CSO intends to recommence the publication of the 2017 crime statistics 'under reservation' in the second quarter of this year and so the remainder of the figures sought by the Deputy will become available at that stage.

Garda Data

137. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons released from jail that went on to commit an offence again within three years of their release; the proportion of the number of released prisoners they represented, by each of past five years, by category of offence, and by period within which the subsequent crime was committed, in tabular form; the way in which the rate of recidivism here compares with other EU countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7604/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the latest data in relation to recidivism (re-offending) rates for offenders who were given a custodial sentence or community sanction is contained in the fourth set of recidivism studies published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in December 2016. This and the previous three studies have allowed the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service access to comprehensive data in relation to the rate of recidivism among ex-prisoner. These studies are on the website www.cso.ie.

The 2016 study reports on:

- Prison Recidivism which is a detailed study on those who were released from a custodial prison sentence in 2010 and whether they were subsequently convicted of a further offence up to the end of 2013 and

- Probation Recidivism which is a detailed study of recidivism among offenders placed under Probation Service supervision in 2010.

The Prison Recidivism Study's findings indicate that the recidivism or re-offending rate was 45.1% for the particular cohort of offenders released in 2010. When compared with the equivalent cohort from the 2009 study there is a fall in recidivism of 2.4%. This follows the 3.5% decrease that was seen for the 2009 cohort from the previous report.

For the purposes of this study, release recidivism is defined as an individual committing a criminal offence (a 're-offence') within a three year period following their release from prison and being subsequently convicted for that offence. Internationally, sample selection and definitions of recidivism as well as follow up times & outcomes can vary considerably. These dif-

ferences in recording and reporting practises can invalidate findings and make comparisons between countries difficult. In this respect, it will be noted that no link to an international comparison is provided in that section of the CSO website where the 2016 study is published.

Divorce Process

138. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to alleviate the backlog of divorce cases to be heard by the courts; his further plans to expedite the appointment of appropriate judges to clear the backlog of divorce cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7606/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. Furthermore, the scheduling of court cases and the allocation of court business is a matter for the Presidents of the Courts and the presiding judges who are, under the constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the Circuit Court has concurrent jurisdiction with the High Court in family law proceedings (including judicial separation, divorce and nullity), with the High Court generally dealing with cases involving considerable assets or income as well as appeals from the Circuit Court. Where the market value of lands exceeds €3 million the Circuit Court must, on application to it by an interested party, transfer the proceedings to the High Court.

The Courts Service has advised that the current waiting time in the High Court for a hearing date for a divorce case is three months from the time the parties indicate to the Court that they are ready for hearing. Issues which may arise between parties before trial may result in a case taking considerably longer, but there is currently no backlog in the High Court of cases awaiting hearing dates.

The Courts Service has also advised that waiting times for the transaction of family law business in the Circuit Court are listed in the table, noting that waiting times are collated on a Court office basis rather than on an individual Court basis and that the waiting times are not specifically collated on a case type basis e.g. divorce cases.

Circuit Court Family Law - Waiting times in months

Office	Family Law Contested	Family Law Non-contested	Family Law Appeals
Carlow	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Carrick on Shannon	6	Next sitting	Next sitting
Castlebar	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Cavan	6	Next sitting	Next sitting
Clonmel	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Cork	6-9	Next sitting	Next sitting
Dublin	3-5	2	4
Dundalk	6-12	Next sitting	6-12
Ennis	6	Next sitting	6

Office	Family Law Con- tested	Family Law Non- contested	Family Law Appeals
Galway	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Kilkenny	6	Next sitting	Next sitting
Letterkenny	6-9	Next sitting	6-9
Limerick	Next sitting	Next sitting	3-6
Longford	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Monaghan	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Mullingar	6	Next sitting	Next sitting
Naas	6	Next sitting	6
Portlaoise	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Roscommon	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Sligo	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Tralee	Next sitting	Next sitting	Next sitting
Trim	6-9	Next sitting	6-9
Tullamore	6	Next sitting	Next sitting
Waterford	3-6	Next sitting	Next sitting
Wexford	6-12	Next sitting	3-6
Wicklow	6-9	3-6	6

Note: The waiting time is from receipt of notice of trial/notice of motion to listing for hearing in contested and uncontested matters.

The Courts Service has further advised that delays in the hearing of cases and the size of court lists can be impacted by a number of factors, many of which are outside the control of the courts and the Courts Service, for example, the unavailability of a witness or vital evidence, delays in the furnishing of reports or because the parties and/or legal practitioners are not ready to proceed on allocated dates. This gives rise to adjournments, which can have an impact on the time taken to complete the hearing of a case and on the number of cases which can be disposed of in a court sitting. Most adjournments are sought by parties to a case.

The Courts Service has also informed me that the Presidents of the High and Circuit Courts monitor waiting times and workload across all court lists and seeks to ensure the optimum use of court time and judicial resources. Wherever possible, the Presidents targets additional judicial resources at the areas of greatest need.

The Government is committed to significant reform of the courts, including the establishment of a family law court structure that is streamlined, more efficient, and less costly. My Department is currently working on the General Scheme of a Family Court Bill which will aim to streamline family law court processes, clarify jurisdictional issues and provide for a set of guiding principles to help ensure that the Family Court will operate in a user-friendly and efficient manner. The intention is to establish a dedicated Family Court within the existing court structures. The Family Court Bill will support the provisions in the Mediation Act 2017 by encouraging greater use of alternative dispute resolution to assist in more timely resolution of family law cases.

I hope to secure Government approval in the coming months for the General Scheme of a Family Court Bill. Once the General Scheme has been approved by Government, it will be referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting and to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny.

Commencement of Legislation

139. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for the full commencement of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7636/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 was enacted on 6 April 2015 but has not yet been fully commenced. The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions Order) 2016 (S.I. No. 12 of 2016) commenced the bulk of the Act with effect from 18 January 2016. That Commencement Order brought provisions of Parts 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13 of the Act into operation. The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (Commencement) Order 2017 (S.I. No. 355 of 2017) commenced part of section 47(c) of the Act with effect from 31 July 2017 and the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (Commencement) (No. 2) Order 2017 (S.I. No. 474 of 2017) commenced provisions of the Act relating to adoption by civil partners and cohabiting couples with effect from 2 November 2017.

Part 10 of the Act, which amended the Passports Act 2008, was commenced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade on 1 July 2015.

Part 11 of the Act, which related to adoption, was not commenced and was repealed by section 2(2) of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017, which came into operation on 19 October 2017, as provided for by the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 (Commencement) Order 2017 (S.I. No. 443 of 2017). The provisions in Part 11 have been incorporated into the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017, for which the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is responsible.

Section 177 of the Act has not yet been commenced due to technical issues, which have now been resolved. The Department is currently reviewing the section to ensure that there are no further outstanding issues. It is expected that the section will be commenced in early course.

Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provide for parentage through donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR). The issue of the recognition of parentage for same-sex couples and their children is dealt with under Part 2 of the Act. The Minister for Health has responsibility for commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Act.

Other provisions of the Act which relate to DAHR have not yet been commenced as they are linked to Parts 2 and 3. The commencement of the provisions of the Act which are related to Parts 2 and 3 will be co-ordinated with the commencement of those Parts by the Minister for Health.

In this regard, the Deputy will be aware that the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill is undergoing pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health. That Bill will provide for the establishment of an Assisted Human Reproduction Regulatory Authority which will, among other things, undertake certain functions under Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.

Part 9 of the Act provides for a number of amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004. No provision of Part 9 has yet been commenced. Some sections cannot be commenced until Parts 2 and 3 are brought into operation by the Minister for Health. Other sections are dependent on provisions of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 being commenced and my Department is liaising with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to scheduling the commencement of these sections.

Data Protection

140. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and/or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7650/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department is actively working towards GDPR compliance. The Department has established a Data Protection Support and Compliance Office headed by a Principal Officer (the Department's designated Data Protection Officer). The DPSC Office is working across divisions and relevant agencies to lead the implementation of systems and policies in compliance with the GDPR requirements.

Over the past year a number of briefing sessions have been held for senior managers whose divisions hold significant volumes of personal data. Work has been undertaken to identify the most appropriate e-learning training package available with the intention of delivering GDPR specific training to staff across the organisation ahead of May 25. More specialised training needs are also receiving attention. In support of these measures, the Department will also roll out a internal communications plan to raise awareness of the GDPR and its implications.

Courts Service Data

141. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the licensed premises granted annual dance licences by court district No. 17, from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015. [7678/18]

142. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the licensed premises granted temporary dance licences by court district No. 17, from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015. [7679/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 and 142 together.

As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that while it can provide information regarding temporary and annual dance licences granted in Court District No. 17 from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, it does not collect information as to whether the premises is a licenced premises.

Therefore, the following tables provide information regarding temporary and annual dance licences granted in Court District No. 17 from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015.

Temporary Dance Licences granted in Court District No. 17 from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES
29/04/2015	TRALEE	QUARTERS NIGHT CLUB, GODFREY PLACE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
27/05/2015	TRALEE	QUARTERS NIGHT CLUB, GODFREY PLACE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
22/07/2015	TRALEE	FESTIVAL DOME, DAN SPRING ROAD, TRALEE, CO. KERRY

Annual Dance Licences granted in Court District No. 17 from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES
05/02/2015	LISTOWEL	J.D. O'MAHONY'S, MAIN STREET, BALLYBUNION, CO. KERRY
20/05/2015	TRALEE	KENMARE BAY HOTEL, GORTAMULLEN, KENMARE, CO. KERRY
24/06/2015	TRALEE	QUARTERS NIGHTCLUB, GODFREY PLACE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
10/09/2015	CAHIRCIVEEN	RING OF KERRY HOTEL, CAHIRCIVEEN, CO. KERRY
10/09/2015	CAHIRCIVEEN	8/9 CHURCH STREET, CAHIRCIVEEN, CO. KERRY
10/09/2015	CAHIRCIVEEN	SEA LODGE, WATREVILLE, CO. KERRY
10/09/2015	CAHIRCIVEEN	THE HARP INN, CAHIRCIVEEN, CO. KERRY
10/09/2015	CAHIRCIVEEN	THE VILLA MARIA, MAIN STREET, WATREVILLE, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	DROMHALL HOTEL, MUCKROSS ROAD, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	HOTEL EUROPE, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	DUNLOE CASTLE HOTEL, BEAUFORT, CO. KERRY

Questions - Written Answers

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	GLENEAGLE HOTEL, MUCKROSS ROAD, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	T/A KATE KEARNEY'S COTTAGE, GAP OF DUNLOE, BEAUFORT, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	TATLER JACK, PLUNKETT STREET, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	MUSTANG SALLY'S, MAIN ST., KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	T/A MUCKROSS PARK HOTEL, MUCKROSS, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	T/A THE MALTON HOTEL, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	T/A THE BREHON HOTEL, MUCKROSS ROAD, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	GNEEVEGUILLA G.A.A. CLUB, GNEEVEGUILLA, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	CASTLEROSS HOTEL, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	THE LAURELS, MAIN STREET, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	THE HEIGHTS HOTEL, CORK ROAD, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	GRAND HOTEL, MAIN STREET, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	KILLARNEY TOWERS HOTEL, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	THE AVENUE HOTEL, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	SCOTTS HOTEL, COLLEGE STREET, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	EVISTON HOUSE HOTEL, NEW STREET, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	PAT SHEAHAN'S BAR, BEAUFORT, CO. KERRY
15/09/2015	KILLARNEY	MCSORLEY'S, COLLEGE STREET, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
17/09/2015	LISTOWEL	TOMASIN'S BAR, LAHANES, LISSELTON, CO. KERRY
17/09/2015	LISTOWEL	CLIFF ROAD, BALLYBUNION, CO. KERRY
17/09/2015	LISTOWEL	THE MERMAIDS BAR, LISTOWEL, CO. KERRY
17/09/2015	LISTOWEL	GOLF HOTEL, BALLYBUNION, CO. KERRY
17/09/2015	KILLORGLIN	BUNKERS, KILLORGLIN, CO. KERRY
17/09/2015	KILLORGLIN	KYCMS HALL, KILLORGLIN, CO. KERRY

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES
17/09/2015	KILLORGLIN	MUINTIR NA TIRE HALL, MILLTOWN, CO. KERRY
25/09/2015	AN DAINGEAN	AN DROICHEAD BEAG, DINGLE, CO. KERRY
25/09/2015	AN DAINGEAN	THE HILLGROVE HOTEL, DINGLE, CO. KERRY
25/09/2015	AN DAINGEAN	THE DINGLE PUB AND RESTAURANT, MAIN STREET, DINGLE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	BALLYROE HOTEL, BALLYROE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	HENNESSY'S BAR, 35 UPR CASTLE STREET, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	BALLYGARRAY HOUSE HOTEL, CURRAGHLAE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	QUARTERS NIGHTCLUB, GODFREY PLACE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	HORAN'S HOTEL, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	CASTLEGREGORY COMMUNITY CENTRE, CASTLEGREGORY, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	MCMAHON'S, BALLYHEIGUE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	BALLYSEEDE CASTLE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	BANNA BEACH HOTEL, ARDFERT, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	KIRBY'S BAR, MAIN STREET, BALLYHEIGUE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	THE ABBEY INN, BRIDGE STREET, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	THE WESTERING INN, KILMANIHEEN WEST, BROSNA, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	OAKVIEW PARK, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	THE FELS POINT HOTEL, DAN SPRING ROAD, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	RIVER ISLAND HOTEL, CASTLEISLAND, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	TRALEE RUGBY CLUB, CLAHANE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	EARL OF DESMOND HOTEL, CURRAGH-MACDONAGH, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	NO. 4 THE SQUARE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	THE BLASKET BAR, CASTLE STREET, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	STRETFORD END BAR, CAUSEWAY, CO. KERRY

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES
30/09/2015	TRALEE	THE GRAND HOTEL, DENNY STREET, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
30/09/2015	TRALEE	AUSTIN STACKS G.A.A. CLUB, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
01/10/2015	LISTOWEL	J.D. O'MAHONY'S, MAIN STREET, BALLYBUNION, CO. KERRY
02/10/2015	KENMARE	SNEEM HOTEL, SNEEM, CO. KERRY
07/10/2015	TRALEE	MANOR WEST HOTEL, KILLARNEY ROAD, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
08/10/2015	CAHIRCIVEEN	BAY VIEW HOTEL, WATERVILLE, CO. KERRY
15/10/2015	KILLORGLIN	THE OLD FORGE INN, MAIN STREET, KILLORGLIN, CO. KERRY
18/11/2015	TRALEE	BRANDON HOTEL, PRINCES STREET, TRALEE, CO. KERRY
25/11/2015	TRALEE	KENMARE BAY HOTEL, GORTAMULLEN, KENMARE, CO. KERRY
02/12/2015	TRALEE	T/A THE WHITESANDS HOTEL, BALLYHEIGUE, CO. KERRY
17/12/2015	LISTOWEL	LISTOWEL ARMS HOTEL, LISTOWEL, CO. KERRY

Courts Service Data

143. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the special exemption orders granted by court district No. 17 from 16 February 2015 to 16 March 2017, in tabular form. [7680/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that court statistics and information are not compiled in such a way as to provide the detail sought by the Deputy for the time period in question. While the Courts Service were in a position to provide the detail sought by the Deputy in PQ 7681/18 today, this was due to the shorter time period of less than 2 weeks. As the Deputy is aware, licensing applications are not computerised and, therefore, to provide the information sought would involve a trawl of documentation for each court in Court District No. 17 (circa 350 courts) and the collation of data sought in respect of in excess of 4,000 special exemptions granted from 16 February 2015 to 16 March 2017. It would require a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources to collate the data required.

However, in order to be of some assistance to the Deputy, the Courts Service has provided the following information regarding special exemption orders granted in respect of each court in Court District No. 17 from 1 February 2015 to 31 March 2017.

Number of Special Exemption Orders granted in respect of each court in Court District No. 17 from 1 February 2015 to 31 March 2017

	Tralee	An Da- ingean	Killar- ney	Killor- glin	Cahirciveen	Ken- mare	Lis- towel	Total
Febru- ary - De- cember 2015	1,358	25	367	133	158	66	157	2,264
January - De- cember 2016	1,080	64	361	87	223	95	50	1,960
January - March 2017	217	40	92	41	51	30	44	515

The Courts Service has advised that it is currently in the process of implementing an eLicensing system throughout the country, which will include the provision of management information.

Courts Service Data

144. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the special exemption orders granted by court district No. 17 from 20 April 2016 to 1 May 2016, in tabular form. [7681/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the following information regarding special exemption orders granted in Court District No. 17 from 20 April 2016 to 1 May 2016.

Special Exemption Orders Granted in Court District No. 17 from 20 April to 1 May 2016

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES	NO. OF EXEMPTIONS GRANTED
20/04/2016	TRALEE	THE ABBEY INN, BRIDGE STREET, TRALEE, CO. KERRY	3
21/04/2016	KILLORGLIN	THE OLD FORGE INN, KILLORGLIN, CO. KERRY	8

Questions - Written Answers

DATE GRANTED	DISTRICT COURT GRANTED	PREMISES	NO. OF EXEMPTIONS GRANTED
21/04/2016	LISTOWEL	J.D. O'MAHONY'S, MAIN STREET, BALLYBUNION, CO. KERRY	4
27/04/2016	TRALEE	THE BLASKET BAR, CASTLE ST., TRALEE, CO. KERRY	10
27/04/2016	TRALEE	QUARTERS NIGHT CLUB, GOD- FREY PLACE, TRALEE, CO. KERRY	4
27/04/2016	TRALEE	THE MERMAIDS, LISTOWEL, CO. KERRY	15
27/04/2016	TRALEE	JACKS BAR, CRO- MANE, KILLOR- GLIN, CO. KERRY	5
27/04/2016	TRALEE	MCSORLEY'S, COLLEGE STREET, KILLAR- NEY, CO. KERRY	7
27/04/2016	TRALEE	AN DROICHEAD BEAG, DINGLE, CO. KERRY	8
27/04/2016	TRALEE	THE SQUARE PINT & INDIGO CAFÉ, KEN- MARE, CO. KERRY	5
27/04/2016	TRALEE	SEA LODGE HOTEL, WATER- VILLE, CO. KERRY	5
27/04/2016	TRALEE	TATLER JACK, KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY	2
27/04/2016	TRALEE	THE WESTERING INN, BROSNA, CO. KERRY	1

Residency Permits

145. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of persons (details supplied) who wish to remain permanently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7689/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it wrote to the legal

representatives of the person concerned on 19 January 2018 in connection with an application for a residence card pursuant to the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015.

I am advised that INIS informed the person concerned that it is open to them to address the INIS concerns and provide further information and/or documentation in support of the application within the period specified. I understand that no reply has been received by INIS to date. I also understand that INIS expects to issue a decision on the application for a residence card by the end of February 2018 based on the information available at that stage.

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

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

146. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the provisions he will put in place before approval of grants for CCTV in towns and villages; the person or body that will carry out the role of data controller; his views on whether this matter should be carried out by the local authorities, An Garda Síochána or Garda-vetted persons in the local community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7691/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that, in April 2017, in pursuance of a Programme for Government commitment, a Community-based CCTV grant-aid Scheme was launched by my Department to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas.

Under the Scheme, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000. Upon approval of the grant, the applicant will receive an up-front payment of 50% of the grant with the balance to be paid when the system is fully operational.

The requirements of the scheme are based on similar requirements that applied to the previous grant scheme operated by my Department between 2005 and 2013 which assisted with the establishment of some 45 systems.

The key requirements for the establishment of such systems are statutorily based and require that the proposal must—

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the prior support of the relevant Local Authority, which must also act as Data Controller – this is a long-standing statutory requirement, set out in the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 289 of 2006), for the establishment of community CCTV systems generally, and
- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner in accordance with Section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

Full details of the Scheme, including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are all available to download from my Department's website -

www.justice.ie.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders and I would encourage interested groups to avail of the Scheme.

Citizenship Applications

147. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason recognised refugees are being requested to submit original national passports for citizenship applications in view of the fact that as recognised refugees they will no longer be in possession of their national passport but have been issued an Irish travel document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7766/18]

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

All persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a previously held or out of date passport, birth certificate and marriage certificate.

In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their current passport, or a previous passport, birth certificate or other supporting documents the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should, where possible, be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities or embassy responsible for the issuing of passports and birth certificates in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) will consider the explanation given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

148. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there has been no refugee resettlement program in Dublin to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7767/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Government established a Taskforce in September 2015 to manage and coordinate the logistical aspects of resettling people in Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). Minister Charles Flanagan T.D. and I participate in the Taskforce which is composed of key Government Departments, State Agencies and non-State actors.

Concern was expressed by the Taskforce at the difficulty in identifying suitable social housing solutions in the main urban centres due to the high demand for housing and the limited supply available in these locations. It was agreed by the Taskforce that a Housing Sub-Group would be established to co-ordinate the provision of medium to long-term housing accommoda-

tion for the people arriving under the IRPP relocation and resettlement programmes.

This sub-Group was comprised of the following members: -

- Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
- City and County Management Association
- Department of Justice and Equality
- Irish Red Cross.

The sub-Group prepared an approach for resettling people arriving under the IRPP according to a series of objective criteria including the population size of the county into which they were to be resettled. The Taskforce adopted this approach and decided to exclude the Dublin local authorities (and other local authorities with responsibility for major urban areas) from the initial distribution of refugees into accommodation sourced by the local authorities because of the pressure on housing supply in those areas. This decision may be reviewed by the Taskforce in the future.

However, it should be noted that the Irish Red Cross coordinates a programme of voluntarily pledged accommodation for people arriving under the IRPP. Pledged accommodation is sourced in urban areas across Ireland, including in Dublin. So far 26 persons have been accommodated in Dublin through this option and I anticipate that further persons will be accommodated in Dublin in the months ahead.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

149. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the processing times for all EUTR applications, EUTR reviews and EUTR retention reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7768/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can assure the Deputy that the primary consideration of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department is to process applications for residence permits by family members of EU citizens exercising free movement rights in compliance with the requirements of Community law.

I am informed by INIS that there is a significant number of cases on hand arising from a sustained increase in applications since 2014. This has impacted on processing times which range from 3 to 12 months from date of receipt of application. There is, however, a small cohort of complex cases that are outside this timeframe.

INIS appreciates the impact of associated delays on the persons concerned and has taken a number of measures to address the backlog including the assignment of additional staff resources and the sanction of regular overtime. I am also advised that the resources available for these activities, and the accompanying operational and organisational structures are kept under ongoing review to ensure that resources are deployed as efficiently as possible.

Cognisance must also be given to wider policy issues and, in that regard, INIS has serious concerns that a significant number of applications are indicative of potential abuse of the Common Travel Area (CTA). The Deputy will appreciate that such concerns require us to have in place investigations and fair procedures. While INIS is committed to processing applications with the objective of achieving the highest possible level of efficiency for applicants, this must be balanced with safeguarding the integrity of the operation of the CTA and the State's immi-

gration system.

Immigration Status

150. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and the status of same. [7777/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the immigration arrangements which apply to all non-EEA persons who wish to avail of the Third Level Graduate Programme from 31 May 2017 onwards are set out in the policy document “Third Level Graduate Programme Immigration Rules for Non-EEA students” published in May 2017.

I am further advised that, in accordance with this policy document, the Third Level Graduate Programme is confined to graduates who have completed their studies in Ireland and have been awarded a qualification at Level 8 or above of the National Framework of Qualifications by a recognised Irish awarding body. As an exceptional measure, students enrolled on or before 31 May 2017 in a programme leading to an equivalent award at Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications but accredited by an overseas awarding body may apply for a six months’ permission on Stamp 1G conditions. This provision will cease with effect from 31 August 2018.

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

Gender Recognition

151. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if her Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7562/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are currently no guidelines that deal specifically with transgender matters. My Department is however strongly committed to equality of opportunity in all its employment practices. In this regard it strives to ensure that all staff can be confident that their rights under the Employment Equality Acts are guaranteed and that no one will receive less favourable treatment because of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community. The Dignity at Work Policy and the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour also set out important requirements in this regard.

Circular 42 of 2001 and Circular 24 of 2002 set out policies in respect of gender equality and equality of opportunity respectively. HR policy is set centrally by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and they are the appropriate Department to advise as to whether any

update to these policies, or if a new policy relating to transgender matters, is being considered.

My Department are monitoring the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 but have not made a submission to it.

Data Protection

152. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the preparedness of her Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in her Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7639/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In common with all other Government Departments and Agencies my Department is subject to existing Data Protection regulations.

Over the last 18 months, my Department has actively participated in meetings of the the Inter-Departmental Committee on Data Issues, the focus of which has been primarily on the implications of, and preparedness for, the EU GDPR.

In 2017, a survey of business units was conducted to ascertain the volume of personal data that is processed by my Department. While the results of this exercise show that very little personal data is processed by the Department as part of its main business, work is now underway with a view to ensuring that the Department will be best placed to apply the GDPR. In this regard, my Department is reviewing its holdings of personal data and the associated arrangements for processing and filing of such material. Training, tailored to the needs of this Department and its Offices, is being developed and managers and staff will be facilitated in attending such training over the coming weeks, initially focusing on those in relevant business units.

Finally, as required by the GDPR, the Department is appointing a dedicated Data Protection Officer (DPO) to oversee preparation for the transition to the new regulatory regime. The DPO will assist business units with their compliance with the provisions of the GDPR.

Female Genital Mutilation

153. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the delivery of awareness programmes for female genital mutilation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7757/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012 provides for the creation of an offence of female genital mutilation and other offences relating to female genital mutilation (FGM). The legislation takes a human rights perspective and stipulates that the right to practise one's cultural traditions and beliefs cannot be used to justify FGM.

The HSE is committed to progressing health-related elements of FGM with specific reference to awareness-raising among at risk communities, staff information and support. An FGM resource pack for health professionals and relevant staff in maternity and associated settings has been disseminated. The HSE provides funding to AkiDwA, a national network of migrant women, to facilitate working with target communities around raising awareness of the illegality of FGM and sharing information about the risks of this practice.

The HSE funds a specialist clinic operated by the Irish Family Planning Association for girls and women who have undergone FGM.

The project referred to by the Deputy is run by an NGO, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs. The project is funded under the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, administered by the European Commission.

I would advise anyone who may be affected by or at risk of FGM, especially women and parents of young girls, to contact the HSE or AkiDwA.

Hospital Appointments Status

154. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [7554/18]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services

155. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if the review of the mental health peer support worker has been published; his plans to extend the programme to County Wexford; and the timeframe for same. [7555/18]

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.

Disease Management

156. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made in regard to the inadequacies of the diagnosis, testing and treatment of Lyme disease here since the public rallies on the issue in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7556/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted to humans by bites from infected ticks. The infection is generally mild affect-

ing only the skin but can occasionally be more severe and highly debilitating. Lyme disease is diagnosed by medical history and physical examination and can be a difficult diagnosis to make in cases which do not develop the characteristic rash. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies produced by an infected person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease.

Testing for Lyme disease is available in each of the HSE's Hospital Groups, who have a number of Infectious Disease Consultants who are expert in the diagnosis and management of the disease. Laboratories in Ireland generally follow the laboratory testing recommendations of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the Infectious Disease Society of America, the European Federation of Neurological Societies, and the British Infection Association. Irish laboratories have their own quality assurance methods to make sure the tests are working correctly as well as being accredited by the Irish National Accreditation Body to perform the test correctly. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory. This laboratory uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities which involves a screening test followed by a confirmatory test. Testing which is performed abroad may be performed in laboratories which have not met National or International Accreditation (Quality Standards) and these tests may be more likely to give a "false positive" result.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics by General Practitioners. In Ireland, treatment by most clinicians is based on that laid out in evidence-based guidelines published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) in 2006. Antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications, and are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered.

As accredited testing and treatment are readily available in Ireland, there is no need for anyone to travel abroad for diagnosis or treatment.

Emergency Departments

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the plans, timeframe and financing of the new accident and emergency department at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7558/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health care capital projects, my Department has requested the Health Service Executive to reply directly to you in relation to your questions regarding the emergency department capital development at Beaumont Hospital.

Gender Recognition

158. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7571/18]

188. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the requirements surrounding the availability of hormone replacement therapy in regard to transgender health care here; if his attention has been drawn to the lack of physicians willing to prescribe hormone replacement therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7695/18]

189. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see physicians regarding hormone replacement therapy; the number of physicians treating persons through hormone replacement therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7696/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158, 188 and 189 together.

Transgender-specific guidelines have been developed by WPATH (World Professional Association for Transgender Health) and the Endocrine Society (who updated their guidelines in 2017). These guidelines were devised by experts in transgender healthcare, along with members of the International Transgender, Transsexual and LGBT community, and supported by the Transgender Equality Network of Ireland (TENI).

The guidelines recommend a comprehensive multidisciplinary psychosocial assessment prior to commencement of hormone therapy by endocrinology services. The assessment focuses on more than just assessment for the possible diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria. The guidelines highlight several criteria which must be met prior to referral for hormonal intervention. It is important that co-morbid conditions are identified and addressed, and that people access the supports that they need to manage co-morbid difficulties, which can impact on response to medical transition (including hormone treatment).

International best practice involves an assessment by a multi-disciplinary team and shared decision making in the best interests of the individual. Both WPATH and the Endocrine Society Guidelines 2017 specify the assessment must be carried out by a mental health professional (s) with experience in transgender healthcare and possess specific skills. Endocrinologists and General Practitioners (GPs) do not possess these skills, and require access to the multidisciplinary team as described. GPs would only see a small number of gender variant individuals during their lifetime in clinical practice, and would not be in a position to build up the requisite skillset outlined in WPATH and Endocrine Society Guidelines or have the time resource to conduct a comprehensive evaluation.

Informed consent is essential, whereby benefits and risks of hormone treatment and surgery are discussed with individuals seeking these interventions. Although regret rates are low, it can happen and can also lead to high levels of psychological distress. Healthcare providers work with people to try to prevent negative outcomes. The emerging evidence on good outcomes following medical and/or surgical transitioning is based on use of multi-disciplinary psychosocial assessment, fulfilment of criteria for hormones and on-going psychological support throughout the process. It is important that psychological support is available to individuals before, during and after transitioning.

Prescription of hormone blockers and cross-sex hormones for transgender people is relatively new. Significant side effects can occur with cross sex hormones including irreversible physical changes and infertility. There is a lack of long-term research on outcomes. For these reasons the decision to prescribe should only be made by specialists (i.e. Endocrinologists) in consultation with other professionals involved in the assessment process. Shared decision-making is in accordance with best practice internationally. Prescriptions can then be supported by local GPs with specialist guidance.

The Best Practice approach as outlined above is endorsed in the Service Development Model as developed by the Quality Improvement Division of the HSE in 2017, in collaboration with TENI. This model is providing the framework for the development of National Gender Clinics and MDTs for children and adults, funded by the Acute Hospitals and Mental Health Divisions of the HSE. Recruitment will commence to develop these national teams in 2018. This investment in new posts in 2018 which includes one consultant endocrinologist (adult services), one consultant endocrinologist (paediatric services), one social worker (adult services), one speech and language therapist (adult services), one senior psychologist (adult services), one senior psychologist (paediatric services), one clinical nurse specialist (Paediatric services), two administrative support officers (adult and paediatric services) is a concerted measure by the HSE to address the waiting times and immediate service needs of children, adolescents and adults in transition. The HSE, across a number of programmes including mental health, acute hospitals, primary care and social inclusion, is committed to building services for this community in accordance with International Best Practice.

The HSE is a member of the group established to review the operation of the Gender Recognition Act, and the Department has no plans to make a submission to the review group. The number of persons waiting to see physicians regarding hormone replacements therapy and the number of physicians treating persons for hormone replacement therapy are service matters. I have referred these issues to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy Provision

159. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not been provided with occupational therapy in view of the fact that the person's parents receive the domiciliary care allowance; his plans regarding early interventions for children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7584/18]

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

Cancer Services Provision

160. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if proposals by a person (details supplied) to develop a radiation oncology department at Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore, will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7596/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The provision of radiation oncology services in Ireland is governed by the National Plan for Radiation Oncology. The National Plan set out the projected infrastructure and equipment required to meet the needs for radiation oncology over a 20 year period.

Radiation oncology is available in five public hospitals: St. James's Hospital, Beaumont

Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital Rathgar (which three together form the St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network, Dublin), Cork University Hospital and University Hospital Galway. Radiation oncology services for public patients are also provided in two private facilities in Waterford and Limerick under the aegis of Cork University Hospital and University Hospital Galway respectively. Meanwhile, patients from the North West can receive radiation oncology treatment at the North West Cancer Centre in Altnagelvin Area Hospital, Derry.

The model of care for radiation oncology allows for the sufficient volume and concentration of activity and expertise to facilitate high quality radiation oncology treatments in line with best evidence and international best practice. Modern radiation oncology is increasingly complex. Delivery of such complex care requires several key components to ensure safe, high quality radiation therapy. These include appropriate physical infrastructure and equipment to meet the needs of both patients and staff, a highly trained multidisciplinary team including specialist doctors, nurses, radiation therapists, physicists and other health and social care professionals and a system of quality assurance that can ensure that radiation oncology services are safe, effective, equitable, efficient, timely and centred on the patients needs.

Future planned developments for radiation oncology services include the construction of new and upgraded facilities in Galway and Cork and the expansion of the facility in Beaumont. In line with the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 and the National Plan for Radiation Oncology, it is not intended to establish a centre for radiation oncology in the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore.

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

161. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the status of regulations to designate counsellors and psychotherapists as professionals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7602/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The draft regulations to designate the professions of counsellor and psychotherapist under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 and to establish a registration board for the professions have, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, been laid before each House of the Oireachtas. Resolutions approving the drafts have been submitted to each House for consideration. I expect that the Houses will consider the resolutions in the coming weeks.

Primary Care Centres Provision

162. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a primary medical centre (details supplied) in County Limerick; the number of expressions of interest that have been received by the HSE for the provision of this centre; and the current position with the application process. [7607/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Commencement of Legislation

163. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when Parts 2 and 3 of the

Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be commenced; the reason for the delay in enactment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7609/18]

190. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to commence Parts 3 and 4 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7697/18]

202. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to commence Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7778/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163, 190 and 202 together.

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.

Disabilities Assessments

164. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health if there have been changes to the assessment of needs process with regard to the provision of specific diagnosis (details supplied). [7611/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

165. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the provision of medical equipment to a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [7613/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

166. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to reduce the waiting times for cardiac rehabilitation care at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7615/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding glucose monitoring systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7619/18]

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

Hospitals Capital Programme

168. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason the plan for the new diabetes centre at Sligo University Hospital is not included in the capital development fund for 2018; if the HSE applied for capital funding for the project; if not, the reason the funding is being withheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7620/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health care capital projects, my Department has requested the Health Service Executive to reply directly to you in relation to your questions regarding proposed capital developments at Sligo University Hospital.

Hospital Appointments Status

169. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7622/18]

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

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

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

Hospitals Discharges

170. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if accommodation will be provided for a person (details supplied) in a specific facility on discharge from hospital. [7637/18]

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.

Data Protection

171. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7648/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health is working closely with other Government Departments and participating fully in an inter-departmental group on data protection chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, which is identifying GDPR related issues at central level and facilitating coordinated preparations for the coming into effect of the GDPR in May 2018.

The Department's core GDPR related activity, at present, is in working closely with the Department of Justice and Equality on the Data Protection Bill, to ensure that the Bill includes health information provisions consistent with the GDPR that will support patient care and safety and better health service management while, at the same time, building greater public confidence in how health information is handled through improved transparency and other suitable and specific measures provided for in the Bill.

In addition, the Department has been liaising with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, the HSE, the Health Research Board and a number of other health agencies in relation to the legislative framework around the processing of health data post GDPR to create an appropriate and robust legislative basis for the processing of personal data across the health system. This is closely related to a public consultation conducted by the Department in 2017 on the drafting of a health information policy framework. Preparations will continue in the coming weeks and months.

A number of staff in key areas of my Department have attended relevant seminars and presentations in recent months and I expect that additional training will take place over the course of the coming months. An appointment to the role of Data Protection Officer, as required under the GDPR, will be made in time for the coming into effect of the regulation in May this year.

Hospitals Policy

172. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the definition of an unapproved ward in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7658/18]

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

Hospitals Data

173. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the hospital in-patient enquiry, HIPE, code for patients who are overnight boarders; if those persons are recorded

as part of the HIPE data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7659/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Patient Data

174. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the most up-to-date figures for the age, illness and disease profile for persons who have been admitted to hospital but for whom no bed is available and who are boarded overnight in emergency departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7660/18]

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

Hospitals Data

175. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if persons who have been admitted to hospital but for whom there is no bed are recorded for the full duration of their stay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7661/18]

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

Departmental Functions

176. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the legislative steps required to change the competent authority for patient radiation safety from his Department to HIQA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7667/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The transfer of competent authority functions to HIQA, including the provisions required for inspections and enforcement within Council Directive 2013/59/Euratom, may be provided for in regulations made pursuant to the European Communities Act 1972 provided they fall within the principles and policies of the Directive.

Accordingly, it is proposed to amend Section 8 of the Health Act 2007 in the transposing regulations, that is, the European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection Against Dangers from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018.

My Department is working to finalise the regulations in the coming weeks.

Legislative Process

177. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if SI 125/2000 and SI 478/2002 will remain in place until new legislation is introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7668/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Statutory instrument 478/2002 remains in place until revoked by the transposing regulations, that is, the European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection Against Dangers from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018. My Department is working to finalise the regulations in the coming weeks.

I am informed by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment that the Radiological Protection Act 1991 (Ionising Radiation) Order, 2000 (SI 125 of 2000) was made under section 30 of the Radiological Protection Act 1991 and remains in place. SI 125 of 2000 will shortly be replaced by legislation transposing Council Directive 2013/59 EURATOM. This legislation includes provisions to ensure that any order or regulations made under section 30 of the Radiological Protection Act 1991, or licences or applications for licences made pursuant to any order or regulations made under that section shall continue to have legal validity under the new regulatory framework.

Respite Care Services

178. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the service provider for the day respite service in counties Carlow and Kilkenny is deciding on priority in view of the fact that some families seem to be getting monthly day respite while other families with children with complex medical needs are only being offered it every six to eight weeks. [7669/18]

180. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the difference in the allocation of respite care between counties Carlow and Kilkenny (details supplied). [7671/18]

181. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health his plans to change the location of the day respite service in County Carlow (details supplied). [7672/18]

185. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is an unequal overnight respite service for counties Carlow and Kilkenny, in view of the fact it is the same service provider. [7676/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178, 180, 181 and 185 together.

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

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

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

Respite Care Services Provision

179. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the discrep-

ancy in respite services offered to two children in the same family in which there are three children, two of whom have disabilities (details supplied). [7670/18]

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.

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

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

Questions Nos. 180 and 181 answered with Question No. 178.

Respite Care Services

182. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no transparency and little communication with persons since an organisation (details supplied) assumed responsibility for overnight respite care in view of assurances received from the HSE and the organisation. [7673/18]

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.

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

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

Respite Care Services Provision

183. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the status of a committee put in place with regard to overnight respite to which a parent representative would be appointed. [7674/18]

184. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health if all parents on the respite waiting list have been contacted to date. [7675/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 183 and 184 together.

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

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

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

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 178.

Medical Card Reviews

186. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the reason that when cases (details supplied) are being reviewed, a repeat financial assessment is carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7677/18]

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 Deputy may be aware of the key recommendation of the Report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. The Expert Panel Report also concluded that it is neither feasible nor desirable to list conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. Therefore, medical card provision is based on financial assessment. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Accordingly, a patient suffering from either MS or MND will not have automatic eligibility for a medical card.

Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis.

Within the application process, the HSE endeavours to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. The legislation allows the HSE, in certain circumstances, to exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circum-

stances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

The HSE is required to undertake reviews of eligibility in order to ensure that a person continues to meet the qualifying criteria required to continue holding eligibility. Where a medical card is due to expire, these cards are reviewed and a renewal notice is sent out to the medical card holder three months in advance of the expiry date. It is important to note that the person under review maintains eligibility for the card while the review is being conducted, including any period where additional information is requested. It should be noted that no reviews of discretionary medical cards are taking place at this time.

EU Directives

187. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include qualified chiropractors within the regulatory framework under the proposed European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Dangers arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018 in view of the fact that registered chiropractors are included in similar regulations in other EU countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7692/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This questions relates to the transposition of the medical provisions of the Basic Safety Standards Directive (BSSD) by my Department and whether chiropractors will be designated as referrers and practitioners in the transposing regulations. The previous regulations did not designate chiropractors as referrers or practitioners.

Ionising radiation has many beneficial applications however as the use of ionising radiation increases, so does the potential for health hazards if not properly used or contained. The BSSD is an essential piece of legislation which protects the public, patients, workers and others from all forms of ionising radiation.

The statutory instrument transposing the BSSD will designate those who may refer for radiological tests, those who may carry them out and other functions and in this regard I propose to designate nurses, doctors, dentists and radiographers as appropriate. The proposed designation of relevant professionals is based on patient safety and public health considerations reflected in the advice of the Chief Medical Officer.

Information available to my Department suggests that a number of EU Member States do not propose to designate chiropractors for the purpose of the BSSD.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has overall responsibility for the transposition of the BSSD. My Department will finalise the medical provisions of the BSSD in the coming weeks.

Questions Nos. 188 and 189 answered with Question No. 158.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 163.

Medicinal Products Availability

191. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when an oncology medicine (details supplied) will be made available to persons awaiting treatment for lung cancer; the reason for

the delay in making the medicine available to persons and their clinicians in view of the fact that it has been approved and made available in over 20 European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7706/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching a decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by the HSE, including, for example, advice from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

This process ensures that only treatments that are clinical and cost effective are reimbursed. In circumstances where the company has failed to demonstrate the clinical benefit to support the price they are seeking for their treatment, the HSE reaches a decision not to reimburse the medicine.

The NCPE Health Technology Assessment of Pembrolizumab (Keytruda®) for the treatment of locally advanced or metastatic non-small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC) was completed in October 2017. The NCPE did not recommend Pembrolizumab for reimbursement as it was not deemed cost effective.

Until such time as the process has concluded and a formal decision has been communicated to the manufacturer, the application for reimbursement remains under consideration.

HSE Staff

192. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has been hired or contracted by the HSE; and if so, the title, role and length of contract. [7751/18]

193. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has use of a site on the executive floor of a HSE office. [7752/18]

194. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the amount a person (details supplied) has been paid by the HSE since June 2017. [7753/18]

195. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if the services being provided by a person (details supplied) were put up for public tender. [7754/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 to 195, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on these matters.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

196. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that two permanent specialist consultant posts remain unfilled for diabetes services at Sligo University Hospital; if the posts of paediatric consultant and adult endocrinologist at Sligo University Hospital have been advertised; if not, the reason therefor; if the positions

advertised are in line with the recommendations of the HSE-approved national model of care for paediatric health care services in Ireland in that the posts would allow 2.5 days per week allocated to the care of children and adolescents requiring diabetes and-or endocrinology support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7755/18]

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

Hospital Consultant Contracts

197. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date on the establishment of more robust measures to be put in place in 2018 to ensure consultants comply with all their contractual obligations in respect of the 2008 contract; the changes that have occurred since the beginning of 2018 to ensure this matter is dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7758/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have been very clear that consultants must deliver their work commitment to the public system.

For some time now my Department has been working closely with the HSE to find a solution to ensure more effective monitoring of compliance by consultants to their contracts and that compliance is achieved in respect of all consultants.

It is the responsibility of management to make sure these contracts are being enforced and I have asked the HSE to ensure that more robust measures are in place in 2018 to make sure consultants comply with their contractual obligations. I have been clear I will require absolute assurances on this point.

Section 20 of the 2008 Consultant Contract gives the employer of the consultant full authority to take all necessary steps to ensure a Consultant's practice shall not exceed the agreed ratio of public to private practice. Accordingly, I have referred this question in relation to measures to ensure consultant compliance to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Services

198. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of hours that were involved by his Department's staff and staff in the HSE in the course of drawing up the Dublin midlands hospital group plan for a new model of clinical service delivery in Portlaoise hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7762/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Dublin Midlands Hospital Group has been working for some time on a draft plan for a new model of clinical service delivery at Portlaoise Hospital. A draft plan was submitted to my Department in December 2016. This draft report was reviewed in detail and was the subject of detailed engagement between Department officials and the HSE over the course of a number of months. Significant additional work was also undertaken by the HSE on foot of this engagement resulting in a revised draft plan that was submitted to my Department in September 2017.

It remains the case, as outlined at my meeting with the Deputy and the other Laois Oireachtas members in December 2017, that no decision has been made yet on the draft Action Plan for Portlaoise Hospital. I have asked my Department to conduct a consultation process in this regard early this year involving local clinicians and the community.

Hospital Services

199. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the progress in respect of the upgrading of services to be offered at Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel, County Tipperary; the extra planned services that will be offered at the hospital; the timeframe for these services to be rolled out; the value of the investment that will be made to facilitate the upgrade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7774/18]

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.

Hospitals Building Programme

200. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when patients and staff will move into the planned development at South Tipperary General Hospital, that is, to offer extra wards separate from but attached to the existing hospital; the position of the development in the planning process; the recruitment plan in place to ensure the proposed new development will be properly staffed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7775/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Increasing bed capacity in public acute hospitals has been and continues to be a priority in terms of addressing the causes and challenges of Emergency Department overcrowding.

I can confirm that funding has been allocated for the modular build programme to deliver capacity at South Tipperary General Hospital, which is targeted for completion in the latter quarter of 2018.

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

Hospitals Capital Programme

201. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the future capital investment planned for South Tipperary General Hospital that will complement the short-term plans for the hospital in order that the hospital is properly prepared to offer existing and enhanced acute services in the medium and longer term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7776/18]

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

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 163.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

203. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if there is an appeals process in place for medical card holders who were previously receiving lidocaine patches but are now being refused these patches; if so, the details of the appeals process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7779/18]

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 – was approximately €1.8 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 has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010. The projected budget impact on introduction was low due to the specific licensed indication but total expenditure trebled between 2012 and 2016, from €9.4 million to over €30 million, mainly from off-licence 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 other types of pain. The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics estimated that, in Ireland, only 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 its appropriate use, 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. No action was required by GPs and the patient's pharmacy was notified of his or her approval status.

However, since 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients no longer receive this item under the community drugs schemes. In August 2017 the HSE advised GPs of the changes and of treatment alternatives.

It is possible for non-shingles patients to be approved for the patch through the community drug schemes. The patient's GP should apply to the Medicines Management Programme through the online system, and the MMP will review the application and inform the GP of its decision.

I am advised that the MMP has received over 4,500 applications from GPs, of which some 10% have been approved. For many of the conditions applied for, prescribing of the patch was inappropriate, for example for conditions such as deep venous thrombosis, angina, gout and endometriosis.

Where a GP's application is rejected, it may be appealed. Of some 200 appeals to date, the HSE advises that over 50% have been accepted on clinical grounds.

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>.

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

Ambulance Service Staff

204. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the number of paramedics that will be hired by the National Ambulance Service in 2018; the number of paramedics due to retire in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7784/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the question raised by the Deputy relates to a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Orthodontic Services

205. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being made and that have been made recently to recruit a suitably qualified orthodontist in order to reduce the waiting list for dental treatment in CHO 8. [7785/18]

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

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

206. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the waiting lists for orthodontic treatment in CHO 8. [7786/18]

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

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for orthodontic services in CHO 8; and the actions being considered to reduce these waiting times and arrange urgent treatment for cases classified as severe. [7787/18]

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

Animal Slaughtering Data

208. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cattle slaughtered from feedlots in each of the years 2015 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7552/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is not available. Data on animal movements is not recorded by my Department in a manner which would segregate distinct feedlot movements from other movements types.

Greyhound Industry

209. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of the investigation by the Irish Greyhound Board, IGB, control board into a race (details supplied); if the win stands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7557/18]

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

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

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon.

In line with Dail procedures this request can be made directly to BnG using the dedicated email address: oireachtasqueries@igb.ie. The Deputy's question has been passed on by Department via this mechanism.

Gender Recognition

210. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7561/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Gender Recognition Act 2015 is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs & Social Protection, who I understand is currently undertaking a review of the Act.

In line with one of the goals of my Department's Statement of Strategy: "to continue to develop a highly skilled, diverse and gender-balanced workforce", my Department has initiated a staff-wide consultation on a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Policy due to be published shortly.

All staff in my Department are, of course, obliged to treat their colleagues and members of the public with dignity and respect in accordance with the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour. The Code, which is signed by all staff, provides for non-discrimination under the nine specified grounds as stated in the Equality Act 2004, which includes gender. In addition, my Department is committed to the Dignity at Work Policy for the Civil Service which aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace.

My Department has not prepared any written guidelines on dealing with transgender matters, but all staff are aware of their responsibilities in delivering high quality service to the broad and diverse range of customers served by my Department.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

211. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [7594/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Knowledge Transfer Programme is delivered under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 by a network of approved Knowledge Transfer Facilitators. Facilitators who complete all of the requirements of the programme receive a payment of €500 per participant for each year of the three year programme. Facilitator payments under the Knowledge Transfer Programme have commenced on a rolling basis by sector.

The person named is an approved Knowledge Transfer facilitator running 5 groups in the Knowledge Transfer Beef Programme. Under EU Regulations, payments to participant farmers must be processed via the Knowledge Transfer Group facilitators. Facilitators are required to process the payment to the farmers in his/her group and to confirm the completion of this transaction to my Department within a specified timeframe via the online Knowledge Transfer system. The person named has not completed this confirmation process, and thus a penalty arose under the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme.

An appeal in this regard was received from the person named and has now been completed. This appeal has been upheld, and the person named will be notified of this outcome.

Agrifood Sector

212. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions he has had with the farming organisations, industry and relevant agencies regarding the shortage of farm workers, particularly in the dairy sector; his plans to address this in terms of recruitment initiatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7597/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A shortage of labour has been building up in certain sub-sectors of the Irish agri-food sector in recent times. The Deputy is correct to refer to the dairy sector, but labour pressures also exist in the horticultural and meat processing sectors. The reasons for the shortages include: the significant value added growth expansion of the sector in recent years; the growth in the economy as a whole, now approaching full employment; and also economic growth in other EU countries which have traditionally supplied workers for the sector.

My Department and I have had extensive engagement with the industry on the shortage of labour in the dairy, horticulture and meat processing sectors. The issues within the Horticulture sector have been discussed at the Horticulture Industry Forum which my colleague, Minister of State Doyle, co-chairs, while the challenges faced by the meat processing industry in securing labour have also been raised with me by meat industry representatives. I am aware of the impact that these labour shortages are having, and I am committed to helping the sectors involved find appropriate solutions.

In relation to the dairy sector, last November I established a multi stakeholder industry group with a view to ensuring that Irish dairying has access to the human capital it requires to achieve future growth. The Chair, former Secretary General of my Department Tom Moran, expects to finalise an action plan towards the end of this month which will address the short term and medium term labour issues facing the dairy sector. This action plan will be submitted to the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC) for approval.

In addition to the work of this group, a range of other measures are being pursued by the dairy sector to try to attract and retain labour, including exchanges with New Zealand; and efforts at regional level to engage with and attract people on the live register, homemakers and

drystock farmers to avail of opportunities on dairy farms.

My Department and I are also engaged in discussions with my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and her officials in relation to employment permits for non-European Economic Area nationals, as a further strand in the range of options available to address the labour gap. These discussions are ongoing and I do not want to pre-empt their outcome.

GLAS Payments

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7621/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is fully up to date with all GLAS payments.

Question No. 214 withdrawn.

TAMS Payments

215. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by persons (details supplied); the reason the remainder of the grant has not been paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7627/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is no record of the submission of a TAMS II application to the online TAMS II system from the persons named.

GLAS Payments

216. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in a payment for a person (details supplied); when the next payment process will occur; the reason the person had a penalty on a payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7628/18]

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 full payments in respect of the 2016 scheme year and the 2017 advance payment.

A penalty was applied to the 2017 advance payment due to an over declaration by the applicant on one of his actions.

Data Protection

217. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, (EU) 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7638/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has a dedicated Data Protection Unit in place since November 2015, which has been promoting Data Protection and GDPR awareness since its inception. This Unit has been leading the preparation in advance of May 2018 and actively informing staff of their obligations under GDPR utilising our internal communications systems, circulating easy read guides, FAQs and updates via email, a poster campaign, and targeted Data Protection talks.

A GDPR project group is in place since May 2017, led by a Management Board sponsor and with representation from key stakeholders across the Department. This group meets regularly and has examined the GDPR text with a view to its implementation in this Department. The legal and IMT teams are both key partners in the work of this Project Group. A risk based approach has been adopted and is focusing on those areas within the Department which process a high volume of personal data.

Training for all staff in the area of Data Protection has been ongoing since 2016. My Department's Learning and Development Unit have provided courses in Data Protection and GDPR in 2016, 2017 and 2018 to date. Further Data Protection training will be provided throughout 2018. An online Data Protection package for staff is currently being examined.

GDPR preparation is also included as part of the Business Planning process in my Department.

The appointment of a Data Protection Officer is actively under consideration and it is expected that this appointment will be made shortly.

In addition my Department has been certified for ISO 27001 (international information security standard) since 2016 for all areas involved in EU scheme payments. ISO 27001 compliance is currently being rolled out to other areas of the Department. My Department is also planning to implement a records management system to assist with its future GDPR obligations.

Farms Data

218. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of suckler beef farmers by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7702/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information sought by the Deputy is currently being compiled and will be forwarded as soon as available.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

219. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the financial allocations on an annual basis under the 2014 to 2020 RDP to the beef data and genomics programme, in tabular form; and the amount expended on the programme in each year since it was established. [7703/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) commenced in 2015 and will run for six years until 2020. Allocations for BDGP in the Department's vote and payments per year are set out in the following table. Allocations have not yet been made beyond the current year.

Year	Allocation (€million)	Expenditure (€million)
2015	35	34.82
2016	52	62.10
2017	49	47.27
2018	49	

The increase in expenditure over allocation in 2016 is attributable to additional costs incurred, and paid, in the provision of the mandatory training courses and completion of carbon navigators for 2016.

Veterinary Inspection Service

220. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost of a proposal (details supplied), in tabular form. [7704/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Last year my Department reduced the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under three months of age to €1.20 per animal, from €4.80. This gave an important boost to the trade, and brought greater equity in the fees payable for calves, weanlings and adult cattle.

The cost of reducing the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under three months of age can be illustrated as follows:

Veterinary inspection fees for a load of say 100 calves under three months of age come to €120. If reduced by €0.20, the inspection fees would come to €100. If reduced by €0.40, the inspection fees would come to €80. If reduced by €0.60, the inspection fees would come to €60. If reduced by €0.80, the inspection fees would come to €40. If reduced by €1.00, the inspection fees would come to €20.

Radiation Monitoring Systems

221. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the transposition of EURATOM 2013/59 into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7665/18]

222. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the primary legislation and-or statutory instruments required for the enactment of EURATOM 2013/59 into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7666/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 222 together.

My Department is responsible for the transposition into Irish law of Council Directive 2013/59 EURATOM laying down basic safety standards for protection against the dangers arising from exposure to ionising radiation (Basic Safety Standards Directive).

The Directive consolidates and updates existing EURATOM provisions for protection against the harmful effects of ionising radiation by replacing five existing Directives and a Commission Recommendation and covers occupational, medical and public exposures.

My Department is transposing those elements that relate to occupational and public expo-

sure, while the provisions dealing with medical exposures are being transposed separately by the Department of Health. I understand that the Department of Health is working to finalise the European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection Against Dangers from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018 in the coming weeks.

The Basic Safety Standards Directive provides for a risk-based graded approach to the regulatory control of radiation sources in place of the one-size-fits-all system of licensing currently operated by the EPA. The new graded approach to licensing will provide an alternative system of registration for low-risk activities resulting in a reduction of the regulatory, financial and administrative burden on current licence holders. The provisions to give effect to the graded approach are set out in the Radiological Protection (Amendment) Bill which will be published shortly. The Bill also addresses other legal anomalies that have arisen since the 1991 Radiological Protection Act came into force.

The secondary legislation to transpose the remaining elements of the Basic Safety Standards Directive under the remit of my Department has been prepared and will be signed once the Bill is enacted.

Inland Fisheries

223. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures the National Parks and Wildlife Service is taking to ensure effective protection of the north Atlantic salmon in the river Slaney; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3080/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The National Parks and Wildlife Service is part of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) comes under the aegis of my Department and is the agency responsible for the protection, management and conservation of the inland fisheries resource. In delivering this function, IFI adapts development, protection and environmental/conservation practices to maximise the return on state investment in policing, conserving and developing the resource.

The majority of the fisheries on the River Slaney are in private ownership. Nevertheless, IFI adopts a wide-ranging protection strategy and delivers an associated broad protection programme on the Slaney system encompassing coastal (from Arklow to Bannow Bay), estuarine and freshwater (main channel and tributaries) environments.

Protection measures are delivered through the operation of highly trained, skilled and experienced inland fishery protection and surveillance teams, enabled through deployment of state-of-the-art technology and supporting infrastructure, on a 24 hour, 365 day basis.

The implementation of proven traditional work practices has been augmented by the increasing use of new innovative approaches such as kayak and bike patrolling, dog assisted patrolling and covert surveillance using advanced digital technologies. These innovations have assisted in deployment of protection resources and have delivered significantly improved efficiency and effectiveness on the River Slaney system and at a national level. A total of 2,746 person hours were spent on protection patrolling by the IFI staff in 2017 which included kayak, foot, bicycle and vehicle patrols on the main channel of the River Slaney, its tributaries and some other small coastal rivers.

IFI has established a wide-ranging network of stakeholders who liaise with staff regarding possible illegal activity on the River Slaney system. IFI has also experienced year on year increases in reports received to its 24 hour emergency telephone hotline. IFI staff respond to, and act on, all valid communications and information relating to poaching on the River Slaney system received via the 24 hour emergency telephone hotline and other communications and information sources. All this facilitates pre-emptive action by Fisheries Protection Teams when a potential threat is identified.

IFI operates a confidential hotline number to enable members of the general public to report incidents -1890 34 74 24 or 1890 FISH 24. This phone line is designed to encourage the reporting of incidents of illegal fishing, water pollution and invasive species.

In the case of serious infringements of fisheries legislation, IFI initiates prosecution proceedings, in some instances in conjunction with the Gardaí. Gardaí have pursued 4 cases in conjunction with IFI arising from incidents in 2017. In addition, a system of “Fixed Charge Notices” also facilitates enforcement of fisheries legislation without recourse to the Courts process. This system has enhanced the regulatory capacity of IFI and has improved levels of compliance nationally.

Question No. 224 answered with Question No. 26.

National Broadband Plan Funding

225. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if extra resources will be allocated to facilitate the roll-out of broadband across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7464/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government’s National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This will be achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

In September 2015 the Government agreed on and published its 6 year Capital Plan, Building on Recovery, which included an allocation of €275m for the State led Intervention under the NBP. This provides the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government’s intervention. Funding of €75m has also been committed through the European Regional Development Fund.

Further funding will be required over the lifetime of the proposed 25 year contract to build, maintain and operate the broadband network in the State Intervention Area.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

226. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment when broadband will be rolled out to areas (details supplied) in Dublin 24; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7267/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to high speed broadband.

In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

In April 2017, I also signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the rollout by the end of this year. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Although deployment figures for Q4 2017 have not yet been verified by my Department's teams, I understand eir has passed a total of 121,000 premises to date.

The High Speed Broadband Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of this year as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

Premises in the areas referred to by the Deputy fall into all three of these categories. Individuals can visit my Department's High Speed Broadband Map at www.broadband.gov.ie and enter their eircode to find out which category their premises falls into.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consis-

tenancy in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

National Broadband Plan

227. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the assurances he has that a company (details supplied) as the sole remaining bidder in the tendering process for the national broadband plan will not substantially alter the financial terms pertaining to the successful tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7338/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This will be achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

The procurement process, which is a very robust process with strong risk management throughout, reached an advanced stage prior to eir's withdrawal. "Detailed Solutions" submitted by two bidders on 26th September 2017 had already been evaluated by the NBP specialist team and detailed feedback had been delivered. This means that the process has had the benefit of strong competitive tension up until now, which will help inform the NBP procurement team in ensuring that value for money is achieved at final tender stage. The NBP procurement team also have the benefit and will use comparative costings from similar projects in other Member States together with advice from ComReg, the sectoral regulator with responsibility for the cost of access to the eir pole and duct infrastructure, where relevant to the final bid.

The final contract which will result from the NBP procurement process will ultimately be subject to Government approval on the level of subsidy to be provided once a final bid has been received. This subsidy must also be independently reviewed as providing value for money by the National Development Finance Agency as is required for all Government Capital Projects with a value of more than €20 million. The contract will also be subject to audit and review provisions to ensure that any potential over recovery of State Aid post contract by the bidder can be recovered by the State; this is also a requirement under the European Commission State Aid Guidelines for Broadband being followed by the Department.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

228. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the status of the roll-out of the national broadband scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7263/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Delivering high speed broadband to citizens across Ireland remains a firm commitment of mine and of this Government.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area, which aims to serve those premises where commercial investors will not. One company, eir, publicly withdrew from the procurement process on 30 January. While this is regrettable, it is a commercial decision for eir to make. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the enet/sse consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

Gender Recognition

229. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7564/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has not published guidelines for staff or the public specifically relating to transgender matters and my Department is not participating in the review of the Act.

All staff in my Department are obliged to treat their colleagues and members of the public with dignity and respect in accordance with the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour. The Code, which is signed by all staff, provides for non-discrimination under the nine specified grounds, as stated in the Equality Act 2004, which includes gender.

Under the Department's Customer Service Charter, staff in my Department are made aware of the requirement to treat all staff and customers with respect and courtesy. In addition, the Department is committed to the Dignity at Work Policy for the Civil Service which aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace.

Dignity at Work training is rolled out to staff of my Department on a regular basis. In addition, all new staff entering the Department, attend induction training which includes information on customer service and dignity at work policies.

Since it came into operation, no issues relating to the Gender Recognition Act have been brought to the Department's attention by staff, managers or any representative bodies or trade unions. In the event of an issue being brought to my Department's attention, staff in the customer service and human resources areas will treat such issues in accordance with the Act.

Litter Pollution

230. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a provision for sponsoring road rubbish clean up and litter maintenance by businesses with the return of signage endorsing and thanking the businesses for their help. [7592/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The role of my Department, through the Litter Pollution Acts 1997 to 2009, is to provide the legislative framework within which to combat litter pollution. Under the Acts, the primary management and enforcement response to littering rests with Local Authorities, and it is a matter for each Local Authority to decide on the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean-up actions in their area.

When the 2016 National Litter Pollution Monitoring Survey report (<http://litter.ie>) identified a very slight deterioration in the litter situation after a number of years of improvement, I took immediate action on the issue by increasing 2017 funding for the Local Authority Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme (ALAGS) by 28% to €884,000. The ALAGS scheme enables Local Authorities to support appropriate local public education and awareness initiatives to tackle both litter and graffiti. In previous years the invitation to submit applications under the scheme has encouraged Local Authorities to consider the development of 'adopt-a-road' styled projects in their functional areas. In 2017, ten of thirty-one Local Authorities received funding under ALAGS for an 'adopt-a-road' style scheme.

In 2017, I also increased funding for the National Spring Clean by €40,000 to €225,000. The campaign, now entering its twentieth year, encourages every sector of society to actively participate and take responsibility for litter by conducting clean-ups of their own local environment. I intend to maintain these levels of increased funding for 2018. My Department also supports Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL), and has negotiated anti-litter agreements with the banking industry and the chewing gum industry. My Department also supports the Green Schools Programme, which is key to effecting a long-term change in societal attitudes towards litter disposal.

Data Protection

231. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7641/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has established a departmental project group to examine the implications of GDPR, chaired by an Assistant Secretary. The group is currently undertaking a readiness assessment in order to ensure that we are in a position to comply with the Regulation and the Data Protection Bill 2018 when enacted.

My Department has appointed a data protection officer, who has received training and further training and briefing will be rolled out to staff as required.

Mobile Telephony Use

232. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to protect mobile telephone users from telephone scams which are designed to trick persons into telephoning back at premium rates; his further plans to provide the Commission for Communications Regulation with additional powers to combat same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7655/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The telecommunications market is regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation, including in relation to operational issues such as detecting or monitoring scam calls designed to trick persons into phoning back at premium rates. I have no role or statutory function in that regard.

I am aware of Irish phone customers in the last year experiencing an escalated level of such nuisance scam calls and that they can cause considerable distress and anxiety, in addition to causing some customers to incur additional charges. In light of the situation, my officials were in contact with ComReg. The Regulator advised that it published a consumer information notice on 18 October 2017, which provides advice urging vigilance at all times on the part of consumers and listing suggestions for the proactive steps to be taken by those receiving scam calls, and in particular, advising people not to answer or to call back any number which they do not recognise or where there is a bland or no voicemail left. The notice also provides a phone number for consumers to contact and the Regulator also offers a text call back service and other facilities to assist consumers.

In the meantime, ComReg continues to monitor the situation closely. Unfortunately it is not possible to identify scam call numbers in advance, which can resemble normal, familiar geographical or international numbers encountered on a daily basis.

Alternative Energy Projects

233. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of a pilot project for a rooftop solar support scheme; the timeframe for its introduction; the amount of grant aid to be provided; if there is a limit on the number of applicants; his plans to extend this scheme to other microgeneration technologies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7688/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On foot of the October 2017 stakeholder workshop hosted by my Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) along with further engagement with the micro generation industry, I have asked the SEAI to conduct a short study to assess the likely demand for and impact of micro generation, among the public. It is important that before we deploy further public money we validate the demand and projected cost in an Irish context.

The proposed pilot scheme which I announced at the recent Renewable Energy Summit will commence this summer and will target solar PV and self-consumption amongst domestic customers. The data gathered during this scheme and throughout the behavioural and attitudes study will inform future phases of support for micro generation in Ireland, as we align with the

ambition of the recast Renewable Energy Directive which recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers and deliver on ambitions and commitments made in the Energy White Paper and the Programme for Government.

Further details of the pilot scheme for domestic rooftop solar PV self-consumption will be made available when I have received the study being undertaken by the SEAI and have had a opportunity to consider its analysis. I intend that the final decision will be made in sufficient time to allow the scheme to commence this summer.

As set out in the National Mitigation Plan, a very significant increase in effort is required to realise the potential of the residential sector to contribute to the low carbon transition. Improving the energy efficiency of a home so that it needs less energy to maintain levels of comfort is a prerequisite for moving off fossil fuels for heating to less energy intensive renewable energy options. This is why I have been providing additional funding to include deeper energy efficiency measures, combined with renewable technologies, in the range of supports for residential energy efficiency operated by SEAI. Already, solar PV is supported under the Better Energy Communities Scheme and the Deep Retrofit Pilot. Crucial to these schemes is the advice and technical support available to groups of householders and businesses to undertake these measures and embrace renewable technologies.

Broadband Service Provision

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason fibre optic broadband is not being provided to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact the cable is being laid a mere 0.1 km from the person's house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7698/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in an AMBER area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. It is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the SSE/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland.

When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network roll out will commence.

With regards to the nearby roll out referred to by the Deputy, decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

Prior to the roll out of the State led intervention, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

Climate Change Policy

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which various Government interventions to offset the onslaught of climate change are in hand or proposed, such as drainage, flood relief or other such actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7802/18]

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the full extent of the action taken or proposed to address the impact of climate change here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7806/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 235 and 238 together.

The challenges presented by the impacts of climate change are unprecedented, both in terms of their potential scale and the transformation required to prepare for them.

Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework was approved by Government in December 2017, and was published and laid before the Oireachtas on 19 January 2018 in line with Section 6(5) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (the Climate Act). The Framework sets out the context to ensure Local Authorities, regions and sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions, and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making. It includes a number of key actions and supporting objectives.

Under the Framework, seven Government Departments - or Agencies, where appropriate - with responsibility for the twelve priority sectors identified in the Framework will be required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in line with the requirements of Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Climate Act and the policies laid out in the Framework.

The Framework does not identify specific locations or propose adaptation measures or projects in relation to sectors, such as specific measures in relation to flood relief and drainage. Respecting the principle of subsidiarity, detailed adaptation measures will be developed across sectors and Local Government, in accordance with the Framework.

Under the Climate Act responsibility for the development of sectoral adaptation plans, and the prioritisation of the actions within them, rests with the lead Government Minister responsible for developing the plan. For example, the Framework provides that the Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works will prepare a statutory sectoral adaptation plan on flood risk management.

It should also be noted that under the non-statutory 2012 National Climate Change Adaptation Framework, which has now been superseded by the National Adaptation Framework, four draft sectoral plans covering five sectors have already been developed, including for flood risk management, agriculture and forestry, transport, and the electricity and gas networks. These plans will be reviewed and updated in line with the requirements of the new statutory National

Adaptation Framework.

Local understanding is also crucial to getting adaptation right and in this regard Local Authorities will be preparing their own adaptation strategies under the Framework. In publishing the Framework last month, I also announced a funding commitment from my Department of €10 million over five years to establish four Local Authority Regional Climate Action Offices. These will underpin a risk-based approach to climate action at the local and regional level and will provide a coherent and coordinated response to climate change, both in terms of adaptation and mitigation. The Regional Climate Action Offices will be operated by a lead Local Authority in four different regions grouped according to shared climate change risks. The establishment of these offices will enable a more coordinated engagement across the whole of Government and will help build on the experience and expertise which exists across the sector.

Ireland already has a number of resources in place to assist with adaptation planning, including an online resource and guidelines for both key sectors and Local Authorities. As set out in the Framework I will be putting in place arrangements so as to further develop the online climate information platform, Climate Ireland, which provides tools to assist both sectors and Local Authorities in planning and prioritising adaptation actions. While the platform will provide operational support to the key sectors concerned it will also serve as an educational and awareness resource for the private sector and civil society who also have a key role to play in enabling our climate resilient transition.

Furthermore, existing guidelines will be strengthened under the Framework in order to support Local Authorities and sectors in preparing their adaptation strategies and plans respectively, so as to ensure that a coherent and consistent approach to adaptation planning is adopted at national, regional and local levels.

Adaptation planning is an iterative process, with the National Adaptation Framework and the sectoral plans prepared under it to be reviewed at least once every five years in line with the Climate Act. This will ensure that we adopt a dynamic approach to adaptation planning which is informed by the latest scientific evidence thus enabling Departments, Agencies and Local Authorities to modify or escalate adaptation actions as appropriate.

In the coming weeks I will be seeking Government approval to request the key sectors to start preparing their respective adaptation plans, thus initiating another key step in developing a whole-of-Government approach to how we will achieve climate resilience under this new statutory National Adaptation Framework.

Alternative Energy Projects

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address the most serious issues to be addressed in the shortest possible time in order to combat climate change; the extent to which alternative energy proposals feature in this equation; the extent to which Ireland can become less reliant on fossil fuels and achieve maximum carbon reduction in the short term; the timeframe proposed to address these issues in addition to avoiding penalties for failure to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7804/18]

246. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he envisages an ability to achieve the targets in the alternative energy sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7814/18]

247. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment the extent to which his Department continues to plan to utilise existing natural resources and invest for the future in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7815/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236, 246 and 247 together.

The 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development sets out an ambitious long-term commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in Ireland across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and in parallel, to pursue an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

The 2015 Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of Irish energy policy from now until 2030. At its heart is a commitment to transform Ireland into a low carbon society and economy by 2050 and reduce the country's fossil fuel dependency. This ambitious vision for Ireland's energy system envisages a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from that sector by 80-95% relative to 1990 levels by 2050. The White Paper identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050. It also recognises that oil and natural gas will remain significant elements of Ireland's energy supply in that transition period.

In 2016, imported fossil fuels accounted for 69% of our energy needs at a cost of €3.4 billion. Given the inextricable link between energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, achievement of the commitments set out in the National Policy Position and the Energy White Paper will require a significant transformation of Ireland's energy system from being predominantly fossil-fuel based to a clean, low carbon energy system.

As a means of addressing this challenge, the 2017 National Mitigation Plan sets out over 70 individual mitigation measures and 106 related actions to reduce emissions in the electricity generation, built environment, transport and agriculture sectors.

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding. The most recent annual data from the SEAI indicates that 27.2% of electricity, 6.8% of heat and 5.0% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2016. Overall, SEAI analysis shows that 9.5% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2016 were met from renewable sources. The SEAI projects that Ireland will achieve between 13.2% and 15.4% of its 16% renewable energy target by 2020, indicating that Ireland should be between 82% and 96% of its target.

While the focus of my Department remains firmly on meeting our 2020 renewable target and on implementation of renewable energy measures, including the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme and the Support Scheme for Renewal Heat, contingency planning has commenced to explore the potential extent, mechanisms and costs of addressing our targets within the framework of the 2009 Directive.

Any requirement for the purchase of statistical transfers under the Directive to meet compliance would be undertaken against a background of discussions by the Irish authorities with the EU Commission and relevant Member States. As any purchases arising would be made over a period, the costs to the Exchequer of acquiring statistical transfers to meet any potential short-

fall would be spread over a period of more than one year and in any event the cumulative costs would not be known until 2021, the deadline for completion of all purchases.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

237. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the most sensitive environmental issues facing Ireland with economic implications; his plans to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7805/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Framework for Sustainable Development, *Our Sustainable Future*, sets out a range of challenges which Ireland faces, including in relation to the sustainability of public finances and economic resilience. In response to the challenges, it also set out some 70 measures to be implemented across Government in order to create a more sustainable Ireland. A 2015 progress report on the national framework is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

In line with the overall objective of the national framework, the 2016 Programme for a Partnership Government contains a timely and ambitious commitment to shape the long-term direction of Irish environmental policy towards a low-carbon future, and achievement of recognition for Ireland as a country with one of the cleanest and safest environments in the world.

In response to the decarbonisation and other environmental challenges which Ireland faces, my Department's Statement of Strategy 2016-2019 includes a commitment to support economic and social progress and help the country reach its full potential by, inter alia, leading the national transition to a sustainable, low-carbon, resource-efficient economy; protecting and improving our high-quality natural environment; and ensuring the sustainable and productive use of our natural resources.

The National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July 2017, represents an initial step to set Ireland on a pathway to achieve the deep decarbonisation required by mid-century in line with Government policy objectives. It contains a series of mitigation measures and actions to address the immediate challenge to 2020 and to prepare for the EU targets that Ireland will take on for 2030. It also begins the development of work to meet the objectives of the National Policy Position for 2050.

Ireland also needs to tackle the challenges presented by the impacts of climate change which are unprecedented, both in terms of the potential scale and the transformation required to prepare for them. The National Adaptation Framework published last month sets out the context to ensure local authorities, regions and key sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, develop adaptation plans and strategies to implement climate resilience actions and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making.

In parallel to the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework, I have also committed to putting in place a national Clean Air Strategy with the aim of enhancing and protecting the quality of the air that we breathe. Work is on-going in my Department and it is my intention that the Clean Air Strategy will provide the strategic policy framework to identify and promote the required integrated measures across Government to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air while delivering on wider social and economic objectives.

All of these actions are consistent to Ireland's commitment to the 2015 international agree-

ment on Transforming our World – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In direct response to the 2030 Agenda and in advance of Ireland’s first national voluntary review at the United Nations in July 2018, my Department is finalising coordination of a National Implementation Plan which I will publish shortly. Looking beyond the first national voluntary review, I also intend to develop a renewed high-level national policy position on environment protection. Work on this policy initiative is at an early stage in my Department but I intend to complete it in 2018.

In addition, both the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2016 report on the state of the environment, Ireland’s Environment: An Assessment 2016, and the National Risk Assessment 2017, prepared by the Department of the Taoiseach, identify a range of environmental risks but highlight Climate Change and the need to decarbonise the economy as the most pressing environmental issue for Ireland. I agree with this assessment.

The National Risk Assessment 2017 may be found here: https://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2017/National%20Risk%20Assessment%202017%20-%20Overview%20of%20Strategic%20Risks.pdf

Ireland’s Environment: An Assessment 2016 may be found here: http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/indicators/SoE_Report_2016.pdf

Question No. 238 answered with Question No. 235.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

239. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he plans to take to expedite the provision of broadband in all areas throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7807/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government’s National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the rollout by the end of this year. Information on eir’s planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department’s website www.dccae.gov.ie.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the sse/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government’s objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in re-

spect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

Broadband Service Provision

240. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when attempts were made by way of investment in the telecommunications sector to provide modern high speed broadband throughout the country; the locations in which specific investment took place; if same is concluded or still pending; the way in which the advance of broadband here compares with other jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7808/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Previous governmental initiatives to deliver or improve broadband service in the State include the National Broadband Scheme (NBS), the Rural Broadband Scheme (RBS), the Galway-Mayo Telecoms Duct, the Metropolitan Area Networks and the Schools 100Mbps Project.

The National and Rural Broadband Schemes were designed to deliver basic, affordable broadband to target areas across the country where premises were unable to obtain a service from a commercial operator. Both initiatives have concluded, in 2014 and 2011 respectively.

During the planning of the Galway-Mayo Gas pipeline by Bord Gais Eireann (BGÉ) in 2005 the then Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources funded the installation of a telecommunications duct alongside the new gas pipeline. This duct delivers limited dark fibre services to customers on completed sections of the fibre between Coolturk (Co. Mayo) and Ballymoneen (Co. Galway). Construction took place between 2006 and 2008.

The Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) are telecoms ducting and fibre optic networks laid in metropolitan areas around Ireland. The MANs are independently managed, maintained and operated for the State by a Management Services Entity (MSE) and are used to provide a variety of services.

A decision to deliver a 100Mbps broadband service to all secondary level schools was announced by Government in February of 2012. All 780+ post primary schools in Ireland now have access to 100Mbps high speed broadband.

The Government's current broadband initiative, the National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By the end of this year that number will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection.

According to a recent Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) report, which ranks EU member states according to a variety of digital markers, Ireland is in the high performing cluster

of EU countries, ranking 8th place overall out of 28.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

241. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which comparisons have been made between the quality of mobile telephony here and that available in other EU countries in view of the fact it appears that reliable satisfactory service exists in other jurisdictions but not here; if the attention of stakeholders and the regulator have been drawn to the poor quality of such services in many areas throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7809/18]

242. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to hold a major communications conference involving all the stakeholders whereby some degree of unanimity might be arrived at and agreement reached on the necessary upgrading of large segments of the mobile telephone service network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7810/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations. The ComReg consumer helpline is accessible at *consumerline@comreg.ie* and I would urge consumers who feel they have not received an appropriate response from service providers to make contact with the Regulator.

With respect to the quality of mobile telephony service in other countries, comparisons between Member States and within regions, can be problematic for many reasons, including the fact that the technical characteristics of mobile phone networks that determine coverage and capacity will vary between operators and locations. Other factors would include the characteristics of individual markets, including topography, population density, frequencies used etc.

Various initiatives are underway to improve the quality and coverage of mobile services and broadband throughout Ireland. Notwithstanding ComReg's independence, I recognise the frustration felt by Irish consumers where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, 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.

In October 2017, together with Minister Kyne, I hosted the first National Stakeholder Forum in Athlone. It arose from the Taskforce's recognition that, given the rapid technological change and the emergence of new equipment and solutions to deliver telecommunications services, stakeholders needed an opportunity to raise concerns on impediments to the rollout of services. Representatives from the telecoms industry, Government Departments and consumer groups attended the event. Issues impacting on rollout of mobile networks were discussed at the Forum, and there were also some new recommended actions for the Taskforce to help improve services

to consumers and in preparing for roll-out of the National Broadband Plan network, once contracts are in place. Following the success of the 2017 event, I plan to hold a similar forum later this year.

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 action 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:

- Revisions to Exempted Development Regulations to facilitate prompt roll-out of telecommunications infrastructure and to prepare Ireland for the roll-out of 5G mobile technology;
- Funding of all local authorities to assign a Broadband Officer;
- Close cooperation with local authorities to develop local digital strategies and to identify approximately 320 high speed Strategic 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.

Waste Management

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which waste reduction and management can be improved to make a more serious contribution to preventing threats to the environment with particular reference to the need to reduce the use of landfills and the utilisation of the most modern methods of waste management in order to protect the environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7811/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): European, national and regional waste policy are all predicated on the management of waste in line with the waste hierarchy, whereby the prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery of waste are preferred (in that order) to the disposal of waste. For instance, collectors of waste must conduct their activities in accordance with the relevant legislation and the conditions of their waste collection permits which, *inter alia*, require that waste is managed in line with the waste hierarchy.

The Government's policy of increasing the landfill levy to its current level of €75 per tonne

has provided a real financial incentive for waste operators to divert as much material as possible from being disposed of at landfill. The success of the above and many other policy and legislative measures, including the National Waste Prevention Programme and the phasing-out of flat rate fees for household waste collection, which encourage waste prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery, has meant that more waste can be put to environmentally sustainable and productive use as opposed to being buried in the ground.

Up until November 2017, different household waste collectors accepted different items for recycling, which lead to some confusion on which items go in which bin. Now, however, following co-operation between my Department, the regulatory authorities, the waste industry, Repak and environmental NGOs, we have a single, standard national list of items and materials that can be placed in the recycling bin. Removing confusion will play an important role in improving the quality of the waste presented for recycling. This will help to ensure that these items are actually recycled, as opposed to being contaminated accidentally by householders and sent to landfill. Supporting householders to ‘do the right thing’ in terms of recycling is important. Householders are also being supported through a number of awareness and education initiatives such as the *Recycling Ambassadors Programme* and *recyclinglistireland.ie*.

Statistics compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency show that we have come a long way in a relatively short period of time in terms of improving our recycling and recovery rates and reducing our reliance on landfill. In this regard, National Waste Statistics are available to download at <https://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/> including the State’s progress in meeting targets under EU waste legislation including the Waste Framework Directive; the Landfill Directive; and the Producer Responsibility Directives (Packaging, End-of-Life Vehicles, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Batteries and Accumulators).

Of particular note is the reduction in the disposal (landfill) rate of managed Municipal Solid Waste, which fell from 41% in 2012 to 21% in 2014.

Environmental Policy

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which efforts continue to be made to reduce the use of plastic with particular reference to banning certain products and activities to protect the seas and marine life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7812/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Our use of plastic has increased exponentially in recent decades. Plastics feature across a wide range of applications and products, such as packaging, construction, electrics and electronics, agriculture, medical and health.

The effects of plastic pollution, in particular, on the marine environment has been well publicised. My colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government is responsible for marine environmental policy, including marine litter policy in the first instance. Both he and I recognise that the waste that is created on land and certain plastic waste items in particular, can represent significant marine litter problems. Accordingly, we are working together to identify measures to address this with our European partners.

On 16 January 2018, the Commission published its European Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy. The strategy focuses on plastics production and use and sets a goal of ensuring all plastic packaging is recyclable by 2030. The strategy is built around 4 key actions:

- Improving the economics and quality of plastics recycling;

- Curbing plastic waste and littering;
- Driving innovation and investment towards circular solutions; and
- Harnessing Global Action.

The strategy lists future EU measures and recommends measures to national authorities and industry for the attainment of its goals.

Coupled with this, the Commission is pushing for higher mandatory recycling targets for plastics. Under the current Packaging Directive Member States are required to recycle 22.5% by weight of all plastic packaging. Under a new Circular Economy legislative package to be finalised this year the Commission is increasing this target to 50% by 2025 and 55% by 2030.

In terms of plastic packaging at a national level, Repak, the producer responsibility scheme tasked with managing packaging in Ireland, has been working with its members (including all the major retailers) to identify ways to reduce or optimise packaging. Under the EU Packaging Directive, Member States cannot impede the placing on the market of packaging which is fit for purpose. Notwithstanding this, I am working with the Local Authorities to roll out an education programme on the recycling of all waste, including plastics.

Air Quality

245. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which a deterioration in air quality has been detected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7813/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the 2008 Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (Directive 2008/50/EC) and the Fourth Daughter Directive (Directive 2004/107/EC of 15 December 2004). These Directives also include rules on how Member States should monitor, assess and manage ambient air quality. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is tasked with co-ordinating and managing the monitoring programme.

Under the Directives, EU Member States must designate “zones” for the purpose of managing air quality. For Ireland, four zones were defined in the Air Quality Standards Regulations, 2011. The zones in place in Ireland in 2017 are Zone A: the Dublin conurbation, Zone B: the Cork conurbation, Zone C: comprising 23 large towns in Ireland with a population of more than 15,000, and Zone D: the remaining area of Ireland.

Ireland currently has a nationwide network of 31 monitoring stations which measure levels of air pollutants in the four zones. This information is delivered to the public in near real-time at www.airquality.epa.ie. The numbers and locations of the monitoring equipment for each pollutant are determined by the requirements of the Directives for ambient air monitoring in each zone.

The Agency’s most recent annual Air Quality Report was published in November 2017 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2016. Values for all network sites were below the EU annual limit value, but exceeded the stricter World Health Organisation guideline values for a number of pollutants at individual sites. The report indicates that most pollutant concentrations are low, with no discernible trend or slight downward trends. It cautions, however, that NO₂ concentrations in urban areas are close to the EU annual limit value,

and increases in traffic numbers or certain weather conditions may lead to exceedances. The report can be found at the following link: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/quality/epaair-qualityreport2016.html>

Notwithstanding the favourable comparison with EU annual limit values, the report notes that maintaining our standard of air quality is a growing challenge. With this in mind, I am committed to bringing forward Ireland's first ever National Clean Air Strategy. The Strategy, which I intend to publish in the coming months, will provide the policy framework necessary to identify and promote integrated measures across Government that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air, while delivering on wider national objectives.

A key part of the Strategy will be the expansion of our monitoring and data gathering capacity, to better inform policy choices. Following a review by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of air quality monitoring and information provision in Ireland, a decision was taken to develop a new Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) which aims to enhance and build on current arrangements. The new national Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme is being developed under Section 65 of the EPA Act, 1992 as amended. One of the key objectives of the programme is to enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. The statutory basis for the programme underlines the importance placed on air quality monitoring in Ireland. The AAMP will double the number of ambient air quality monitoring stations in Ireland by 2022, and enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. Further details on the timeframes for the expansion of the network will be released as they become available. I fully support this important initiative, and have committed funding of some €5 million over the lifetime of the programme.

Questions Nos. 246 and 247 answered with Question No. 236.

Coast Guard Services

248. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve buildings for the Coast Guard service in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7601/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Coast Guard is a Division of my Department. There are five Coast Guard Units based in Wexford, in Courtown (with a sub-station in Arklow), Curracloe, Rosslare (with a sub-station in Carnsore), Kilmore Quay and Fethard-on-Sea. The units are single purpose shoreline search units, that do not have cliff or boat functions.

The Coast Guard has undertaken a station upgrade programme over the last twenty years, upgrading or undertaking new builds on an ongoing basis. The development of Coast Guard Stations is undertaken by the Office of Public Works on behalf of my Department. Upgraded stations, as a standard, typically contain a kitchenette, toilet, showering and changing facilities as well as classroom, operations room and garage space. Selection of the sequence of upgrading depends on a number of factors including an existing station's suitability for modernisation and enlargement or the available of suitable state-owned land for a new build.

In the Wexford area this has resulted in the building of a modern purpose built stationhouse on Rosslare strand, which has been operational for several years. In recent years Curracloe has undergone remedial works, completed in early 2015. Plans are presently being drawn up for a new Coast Guard station at Kilmore Quay and the Office of Public Works is currently in communication with Wexford County Council regarding this development. The Coast Guard is

also currently investigating options for a new Coast Guard station in Courtown. A Heritage Impact Assessment has been undertaken regarding the Fethard-on-Sea station house and the Coast Guard is currently awaiting this report. A limited extension to the Fethard-on-Sea station is also currently under consideration.

Gender Recognition

249. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7577/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department has not prepared written guidelines for staff and the public in relation to dealing with transgender matters.

My Department is aware that, in December 2017, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection launched the Supporting Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: Guidelines for Employers and Employees, which were prepared by the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI). My Department is also aware that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has commenced a review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 with the consultation process on this review commencing in December 2017. My Department will await the outcome of this review and the emergence of any centrally developed guidelines on this very important matter to inform Department staff on dealing with transgender matters.

Rail Network Expansion

250. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the extension of the DART to Balbriggan, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7580/18]

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the DART interconnector and DART underground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7581/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 251 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority's (NTA) "Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035" proposes implementation of the overall DART Expansion Programme. The Government's budgetary framework for capital investment, "Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021", funding was allocated to progress a number of key public transport projects in the NTA's strategy including the DART Expansion Programme.

The DART Expansion Programme has a key role to play in delivering an efficient transport system. When fully implemented the enhancements to the heavy rail system provided for in the NTA's Transport Strategy, will create a full metropolitan area DART network for Dublin with all of the lines linked and connected. This integrated rail network will provide the core high capacity transit system for the region and will deliver a very substantial increase in peak-hour

capacity on all lines from Drogheda, Maynooth, Celbridge/Hazelhatch and Greystones.

The original cost of the overall DART Expansion Programme (including the DART Underground Tunnel element) was estimated at €4 billion, of which €3 billion was in respect of the tunnel as originally designed. The Government decided in September 2015 that the original proposal for the tunnel should be redesigned to provide a lower cost solution. The NTA has been working with Irish Rail on a revised proposal. In the meantime and enabled by significant investment to upgrade signalling and turn-back facilities in the critical city centre area, work was undertaken to upgrade and re-open the Phoenix Park Tunnel in late 2016. This was identified by the NTA as an opportunity in the short term, at modest cost, to bring commuters from the west and south west to the city centre and beyond, and to enable enhanced integration of public transport services for the passenger.

Following the Mid-Term Review of Capital priorities, Budget 2018 increased the multi-annual capital investment funding envelopes for the coming four-year period, including providing an enhanced capital envelope of €2.7 billion for Ireland's public transport investment between 2018 and 2021. This enhanced capital envelope includes funding in the order of €230 million for mainline rail and DART capacity enhancement and will allow acceleration of the initial stages of the overall DART Expansion Programme, focussing particularly at this stage on providing additional fleet to enhance capacity, and extending the electrified DART system. Specifically, it will allow substantial progress on electrification of the Northern rail line as far as Balbriggan - now expected to be delivered in 2022 - and commencing work on the Maynooth line. Planning for longer term investment will form part of the National Development Plan which is the Government's overall 10-year investment plan which we will be launching later this week alongside the new National Planning Framework for the period to 2040.

Dublin City Centre Transport Study

252. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his contacts with Dublin City Council regarding the plans to pedestrianise College Green, Dublin 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7582/18]

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 however I am not involved in the day-to-day development of public transport or sustainable transport interventions, including the specific plans for College Green.

As the Deputy may be aware Dublin City Council and the NTA jointly published the Dublin City Centre Transport Study in 2015 which sets out the various measures proposed for the city centre to ensure the efficient functioning of transport with the city centre. Those two bodies, in collaboration with Dublin Bus and TII, are progressively implementing the measures set out in that document to enable the continued development and growth of the city.

The College Green Plaza proposal is being progressed by Dublin City Council whilst the regulation of traffic flows including pedestrians, cyclists, taxis, buses and the Luas, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), both agencies under the aegis of my Department, and Dublin City Council.

In advance of the City Council's plaza proposal being formally determined by An Bord Pleanála, the NTA have collaborated with Dublin Bus and Dublin City Council to reduce bus vehicle volumes passing through the area, in order to allow city centre junctions and signals to function more effectively. The NTA, TII and Dublin City Council also continue to collaborate

on provisions for pedestrians and cyclists in relation to the Luas tracks. These parties continue to work together to ensure that the Dublin City Centre Transport Study in 2015 measures, including the plaza proposal, enhances the city centre environment, including for users of all transport modes.

Traffic Management

253. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his contacts with Dublin City Council about the plans to reduce inbound traffic at Fairview, Dublin 3, to one lane; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7583/18]

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. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, including the building and maintenance of cycling infrastructure or the regulation of traffic on public roads.

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) and I understand they are working closely with the relevant roads authority, Dublin City Council, on this specific scheme.

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.

Greenways Provision

254. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his plans for a Grand Canal greenway between Hazelhatch, County Kildare, and Grange Castle, Dublin 22, (details supplied) in view of the fact that there is reference to the project as an objective in a number of local area plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7618/18]

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. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, including the building and maintenance of cycling infrastructure.

The creation of high quality cycling and walking infrastructure, such as that proposed for the Grand Canal, is fully in line with Government policy including Smarter Travel and the National Cycle Policy Framework. Furthermore, I was delighted, as part of Budget 2018, to secure significant increases in Exchequer capital funding for a dedicated Cycling & Walking capital programme, as well as an increased Greenways investment programme.

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). The Grand Canal Greenway, including the section between Hazelhatch and Grange Castle, forms part of the Greenway Network of the GDA Cycle Network Plan. Accordingly, NTA will continue to work closely with the relevant authorities, including Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland, to deliver improved cycling infrastructure including greenway

schemes.

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.

Data Protection

255. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7654/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department began its GDPR preparations last year with the appointment, as required under Article 37 (1)(a) of the Regulation, of an Interim Data Protection Officer (DPO) who undertook training and is a Certified Data Protection Practitioner. The DPO also represents my Department at the Inter-departmental Committee on Data issues which is chaired by the Department of an Taoiseach.

Additionally, an identification and audit of personal data has taken place in my Department and through this exercise all staff have been made aware of the Regulation, its impacts on the Department and the new data subject rights under the Regulation. Furthermore, my Department is currently in the process of establishing a Data Protection Working Group which will have representatives from each sectoral area and will engage with the DPO on all issues of ongoing compliance with the Regulation.

My Department has planned training for staff ahead of 25 May 2018. Training will consist of foundation level training but also, in compliance with the Regulation, training that is commensurate to the type of personal data being processed.

Rail Network Maintenance

256. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to maintain vital rail infrastructure for the south-east region; if matters (details supplied) will be reviewed; if additional funding to secure the future of services in the south County Kilkenny area will be investigated in advance of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7663/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy my Department provides capital funding to Iarnród Éireann for the maintenance and renewal of the heavy rail network under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC), in accordance with the requirements of EU law. Iarnród Éireann also receives capital funding, via the National Transport Authority (NTA), for heavy rail projects as well as funding under the Accessibility Grants and Regional Cities Programmes. The NTA is the statutory body with responsibility for overseeing the delivery of public transport services provided under public service contracts including, in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann, scheduling of services.

Noting the responsibilities of Iarnród Éireann and the NTA, I have forwarded your question to both organisations for direct reply in relation to the details provided by the Deputy. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Services Provision

257. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the feasibility of a reinstatement of rail services for Mullinavat, County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7664/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is an operational matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród 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.

Road Safety

258. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce a national accreditation programme for car mechanics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7707/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The introduction of a national accreditation programme for car mechanics does not fall under the remit of my Department.

In general, Further Education and Training awards, the validation of education and training programmes, and the National Framework of Qualifications are administered by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, which falls under the aegis of the Minister for Education and Skills.

Road Safety

259. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the considerable safety concerns arising from cars that have been poorly or improperly maintained by technicians without adequate training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7708/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Road Safety Authority, which comes under my Department's remit, has responsibility for the National Car Testing Service and Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test, both of which will detect vehicles that do not meet the required roadworthiness standards.

However, the standards of vehicle maintenance, as with other service standards, is a consumer rights matter and falls within the responsibility of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, which is under the aegis of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and do not come within the remit of my Department. Neither does the training of technicians who carry out such maintenance, or the adequacy thereof, which is a matter for Quality and Qualifications Ireland under the Minister for Education and Skills.

Road Safety

260. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce a national accreditation programme for bike mechanics further to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter [7709/18]

261. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the safety concerns arising when vehicles, including bicycles, are poorly maintained; and his plans to introduce measures to raise public awareness of the need to properly maintain bicycles. [7710/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 260 and 261 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that at present I have no plans to introduce a scheme for accreditation of bicycle mechanics.

I am acutely aware, however, of the importance of cyclist safety and my Department continues to work with and fund key stakeholders to address how road users behave on our roads in order to promote a safe and respectful approach from all users sharing the public road space.

The Road Safety Authority - which operates under the aegis of my Department - does important work in getting safety messages across. The RSA's 'Cycle Smart, Cycle Safe' campaign directly addressed safety issues for cyclists, including cycling equipment check, Rules of the Road, sharing the road and proper signalling procedures. The RSA continually addresses road safety issues for all road users - including raising awareness of how other road users should interact safely with cyclists - and it actively engages with a variety of key stakeholders across a wide range of media.

My Department also funds Cycle Right and the Green Schools Travel programmes, which help provide quality cycle training for children, to help ensure the safety of cyclists into the future by providing instruction on the safe operation of bicycles in urban areas.

Cycle to Work Scheme

262. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has considered extending the cycle-to-work scheme to self-employed persons and those who self-access their taxes; the estimated cost of such an extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7772/18]

263. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has considered increasing the allowance under the cycle-to-work scheme for those purchasing e-bikes; the estimated cost of such an extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7773/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 263 together.

As the Deputy is aware, tax policy generally and tax incentives, such as the tax exempt benefit of kind under the Bicycle-to-work scheme, are matters for the Minister for Finance in the first instance.

I am very supportive of the Cycle to Work Scheme, which is a tax incentive aimed at encouraging employees to cycle to and from work by allowing for beneficial tax arrangements in respect of the purchase of a bicycle and certain related cycling equipment. Under this scheme, employers may agree with their employees to operate a cycle to work scheme under a salary sacrifice arrangement. Participation in the scheme is voluntary but, where offered by an employer, it must be made available to all employees and directors. The scheme applies to new bicycles and pedelecs (electrically assisted bicycles which require some effort from the cyclist)

and also includes the purchase of certain new safety equipment.

Bus Services

264. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with overcrowding on Dublin Bus especially for persons living nearer to the city in view of the fact that the vast majority of buses commence in outer suburbs and therefore are completely full on approach to the inner suburbs. [7780/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Dublin Bus 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.

Pension Schemes

265. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which he can address the issue of the 10,000 active members of the two CIÉ pension schemes, their need for independent legal advice and the need for an independent investigation into the governance of the schemes; and his plans to actively engage with the 10,000 members of the schemes. [7781/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Issues in relation to Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) pension schemes are primarily a matter for the trustees of the pension schemes, the CIÉ Group and their employees.

In a Topical Issues debate in this House on 6 December 2017, I outlined the challenges faced in addressing the solvency of the schemes and the process underway to address the deficit which involves detailed discussion between CIÉ and employee representatives, facilitated by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). I said that CIÉ was on record at the WRC that it will not impose any change that it proposes without the agreement of the active members of both schemes and that it will continue to contribute to both schemes in accordance with the rules of the schemes. I am informed that this remains CIÉ’s position in order to bring about a set of proposals that could form the basis of the trustees’ submission to the Pensions Authority.

I have referred this question to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Safety

266. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding incursions by a club (details supplied) onto roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7782/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While road traffic legislation does not provide for a specific requirement in respect of such events, Article 49 of the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997 (as amended) state that a person in charge of an animal which is being conducted along or on to a road shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that the animal does not obstruct traffic or pedestrians. Enforcement of the Regulations is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

Operational responsibility for individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Rail Network

267. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeframe for the electrification of the national railways in line with commitments made to tackle emissions and phase out diesel trains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7783/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Public Transport, including rail, will, have to play a significant role in the national mitigation effort and investments being made in public transport and sustainable transport measures in order to promote modal shift will be critical in this regard. As part of Ireland’s effort to contain emissions and mitigate climate change, I am dedicated both to increasing the capacity of our public transport system and to facilitating the uptake of low-emission vehicles and technologies within the public transport sector.

The Government is committed to furthering the progressive development of electric fuelled public transport, particularly along high demand routes in the GDA where capacity requirements make such investment cost-effective. Rail already plays an important role in meeting increased passenger demand while also providing an energy-efficient mode of transport. The rail sector accounts for only 1.1% of transport emissions. Electrified rail use, in particular, is capable of achieving low emissions through utilising renewable sources of energy. Rail operators are also already playing an active role in emission reductions on existing services, introducing a range of technical measures including automatic engine shutdown, configuring train length to match passenger demand and installing traction control software.

Considerable progress has already been made on increasing capacity on the electrified light and heavy rail networks through the Luas and DART networks. In terms of future investment plans, the Metro system is due to commence construction in 2021 with passenger services starting in 2027 while funding of the DART Expansion Programme will allow substantial progress on electrification of the Northern rail line as far as Balbriggan - now expected to be delivered in 2022 - and commencing work on the Maynooth line. The DART Expansion Programme also has a key role to play in delivering an efficient transport system that will deliver a very substantial increase in peak-hour capacity on all lines from Drogheda, Maynooth, Greystones and Hazelhatch on the Kildare line while also contributing to the overall aim of combating climate change.

Road Improvement Schemes

268. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific funding will be allocated in 2018 for a road improvement programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7790/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo.

As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

This year I have given an allocation of €25,000 to Cavan County Council to enable the Council to undertake a preliminary appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Investment Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of this appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for development post 2021.

Road Improvement Schemes

269. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that provision is made in the capital plan to provide for the upgrading of an arterial route (details supplied) in view of the importance of this route for a large portion of the Border region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7791/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo.

As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

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Public Bike Schemes

270. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, the updated subscriber and usage figures for 2017 for Galway, Cork and Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7795/18]

271. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, the cost and location of the eight new bicycle docking stations in Galway city; the agency that bore the cost; the cost and location of new docking stations in counties Limerick and Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7796/18]

272. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, the key performance indicators in relation to the scheme for Galway, Limerick and Cork cities; the extent to which each has been met, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7797/18]

273. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, the number of docking stations in Galway, Limerick and Cork cities which required relocation; the original location of each; the new location of each; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7798/18]

274. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, the number and location of all docking stations in Galway city; the number and location of those in use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7799/18]

275. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, the review mechanism in place in advance of exercising the option to extend the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7800/18]

276. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 82 of 22 November 2017, if there was a subsequent substitution of one or more of those companies following the award of contract on 24 April 2014 to a consortium comprising three companies; if so, the name of the company; when the change took place; the process involved in the substitution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7801/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 to 276, inclusive, together.

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

Decisions regarding contracts, operation and any proposed expansions of the bike schemes are matters falling under the remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA). Therefore, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for consideration and direct response. If you have not received a reply within 10 working days please contact my Office.

Gender Recognition

277. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if her Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7563/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department does not have specific written guidelines for staff and public in relation to dealing with transgender matters.

My Department operates the Dignity At Work policy - an anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy for the Irish Civil Service - which aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace for all employees.

My Department is represented as a key stakeholder on the Review Group of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 chaired by Moninne Griffith.

Family Resource Centres

278. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when decisions will be made by Tusla on applications submitted in December 2017 under the family resource centre scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7585/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers the Family Resource Centre Programme. As part of Budget 2018, I was pleased to announce that additional funding of approximately €5.0 million is being allocated to existing centres and to support the expansion of the programme, with the inclusion of an additional 11 centres in 2018. The closing date for receipt of applications, by Tusla, was 20th December 2017.

Over €2.0 million of the additional funding announced in Budget 2018 was allocated to existing centres for investment in small works in December 2017. The remainder of this funding will be allocated to Family Resource Centres this year.

Tusla has advised that it has received a total of 43 applications for inclusion in the Family Resource Centre Programme from community organisations. Tusla is currently assessing all applications. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the assessment at the beginning of March 2018.

I highly value the work of Family Resource Centres across the country. Tusla is committed to using all available resources for children and families in the most efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way.

Data Protection

279. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the preparedness of her Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in her Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7640/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) very significantly increases the obligations and responsibilities for organisations and businesses in how they collect, use and protect personal data. At the centre of the new law is the requirement for organisations and businesses to be fully transparent about how they are using and safeguarding personal data, and to be able to demonstrate accountability for their data processing activities.

My Department is very aware of the challenges that GDPR compliance will present and is

actively preparing for it. A dedicated resource was put in place in late 2017 to help drive GDPR readiness across the Department and additional resources will be put in place over the coming weeks in this regard.

GDPR readiness and associated challenges is recognised as a Corporate Risk on the Department's Risk Register and was discussed at Management Board and at senior management level across the Department in recent weeks. A communications strategy for staff is under development and will be rolled out shortly. My Department has also commenced a comprehensive review of the processing activities we undertake and the way we engage with citizens, and the additional responsibilities in respect of personal data that we will have under the new regulation.

In terms of overall public service approaches to GDPR, my Department attends at an Inter-Departmental Group on Data Issues and also works closely with colleagues in other Government Departments to discuss issues of common concern and share learning and experiences.

Gender Recognition

280. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7575/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established on 19 July 2017, to deliver on the Government's commitment to bring a greater degree of coordination and cohesion to all of the work of Government in so far as it impacts on rural Ireland and on communities

My Department is strongly committed to equality of opportunity in all its employment and customer service practices. All internal and external stakeholders can be confident that their rights under the Employment Equality Acts are guaranteed and that no one will receive less favourable treatment by my Department because of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

The Civil Service People Strategy for 2017-2020 contains an action for delivery in 2018 to review and revise the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Policy to ensure the composition of the Civil Service is reflective of Irish society; the value of a diverse workforce is recognised internally and externally and helps to address our public sector duty to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and protect the human rights of civil servants. My Department will actively participate in the development and implementation of this policy.

My Department will also develop its own HR Strategy in 2018. This will include a learning and development plan for all staff, including training in equality and diversity initiatives for staff.

My Department has not made a submission to the review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015. This review is ongoing and my Department will participate in any initiatives under this review as appropriate.

Data Protection

281. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7652/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): An Inter-departmental Committee (IDC) on Data Related Issues was established by the Department of an Taoiseach in 2015. This is the key vehicle for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) preparations, and in ensuring a consistent approach across the public sector. My Department is a member of this IDC.

In addition, officials in my Department are currently sourcing appropriate training to ensure my Department is fully prepared to implement the provisions of the GDPR. This will include general awareness and information sessions for all staff as well as more specialised training for key personnel.

In addition, the Office of Government Procurement will be putting in place a Framework Agreement for the training of all Data Protection Officers (DPO) across the civil service. This training for the DPO will take place prior to the enactment of the GDPR.

Rural Development Programme Funding

282. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the financial allocations on an annual basis under the 2014 to 2020 rural development programme per measure 19, support for Leader local development; the annual amount expended on the programme in each year of the RDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7701/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER, which is referred to at EU level as Measure 19 of the Rural Development Programme, forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over the period in question. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be delivered at a national level.

The €220 million funding which has been allocated to the LAGs is provided for the duration of the Programme, rather than on an annual basis. This provides greater flexibility to the LAGs in managing their resources.

Table 1 details the funding allocations provided to LAGs by county under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme. The LEADER areas are, in the main, aligned with the county boundaries. However, Co. Cork includes three LEADER sub-regional areas.

Table 2 details the overall expenditure incurred each year to date under the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme.

Expenditure under the programme commenced in 2015 and, for that year, relates to support payments for the preparation of Local Development Strategies. Funding Agreements for the current LEADER programme were, for the most part, signed with the LAGs in the second half of 2016 and the programme effectively became operational from that date from the point of view of project commencement.

Expenditure for 2017 and to date in 2018 includes preparatory support, administration and animation costs, and project expenditure. Project approvals under LEADER have increased significantly since July and I understand that a total of 725 projects have now been approved by the LAGs, with a combined value of €20.5 million. The level of project expenditure under the programme is therefore expected to increase significantly as payment claims are submitted to my Department through the LAGs in respect of these projects.

Table 1

County	Programme Allocation (€)
Carlow	6,416,803.43
Cavan	8,522,285.84
Clare	8,920,224.65
Cork	13,938,823.22
Donegal	12,913,877.86
Dublin	6,370,438.43
Galway	12,195,883.61
Kerry	10,219,868.29
Kildare	5,261,600.01
Kilkenny	7,791,572.91
Laois	7,124,586.86
Leitrim	5,998,474.74
Limerick	9,276,593.96
Longford	7,597,623.07
Louth	6,101,862.01
Mayo	11,121,431.88
Meath	6,903,123.57
Monaghan	7,592,719.51
Offaly	8,036,763.90
Roscommon	8,852,659.22
Sligo	7,655,647.81
Tipperary	10,103,443.28
Waterford	7,522,796.18
Westmeath	7,384,206.22
Wexford	9,840,140.56
Wicklow	6,336,549.00
TOTAL	€220,000,000

Table 2: LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure broken down per year

Year	Total
2015	€1,251,185.25
2016	€1,260,920.54
2017	€12,123,851.06
2018 (to date)	€1,239,720.64

Social Welfare Schemes Data

283. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of full rate qualified child increases and half rate qualified child increases, respectively, in payment at the end of 2017 to persons on jobseeker’s benefit, jobseeker’s allowance, excluding jobseeker’s transition payment, jobseeker’s transition payment, one-parent family payment and farm assist, by scheme, by children aged 12 to 22 years of age, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7547/18]

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

Number of qualified child increases in payment at end 2017 by scheme aged 12 to 22 years of age

Scheme	Qualified Child Increase Full Rate	Qualified Child Increase Half Rate
Jobseeker’s Benefit	1,448	945
Jobseeker’s Allowance (excluding Jobseeker’s Transition Payment)	31,186	8,141
Jobseeker’s Transition Payment	12,470	0
One-Parent Family Payment	13,433	0
Farm Assist	2,379	713

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Eligibility

284. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an anomaly exists (details supplied); if so, her plans to rectify it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7553/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that, for social assistance schemes, all income and capital, including property other than the family home, is assessable for means-testing purposes.

For recipients of the State Pension (Non-Contributory), Disability Allowance and the Blind Pension, where the claimant sells their principal residence in order to purchase alternative accommodation which will be occupied as his or her main residence, then social welfare legislation provides for €190,500 of the gross proceeds to be disregarded in the means assessment. This disregard also applies in cases where the claimant sells their principal residence in order to reside with a carer who is in receipt of Carer’s Benefit or Carer’s Allowance in respect of the care and attention provided to the claimant.

Accordingly, in the case outlined by the Deputy, if the claimant is in receipt of the State Pension (Non-Contributory), and sells his or her house to use the proceeds to purchase alternative accommodation (in this case, an extension to the son or daughter’s house) which will be the claimant’s main residence, then the disregard should apply. In this regard, the legislation refers to “alternative accommodation” which is not restricted to the purchase of a house or apartment and can include purchasing an extension.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

285. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which her Department manages and refunds social welfare underpayments due to persons who have omitted to claim their benefits or have been incorrectly deemed eligible for the benefits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7560/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department is not clear as to the nature of the Deputy’s query in this instance. This Department does not have underpayments as such. We have claims that may need to be backdated and arrears paid in certain circumstances. Once a decision is made and a claim has been awarded payment issues promptly. This payment will also include any arrears due to the customer at that point from the date they made the claim or the date from when they are entitled to the payment e.g. pension age.

If the Deputy has a particular case in mind if they send the Department the details we will have the matter examined.

Gender Recognition

286. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if her Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7568/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, I launched a review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 last November. The group established to review the Act is chaired by Ms Moninne Griffith and is comprised of members of support and advocacy organisations, other independent experts in the field, as well as representatives of Government bodies with an interest in this area. My Department is represented on the Review Group and provides the secretariat to the group. The closing date for written submissions to the Group was 5th February 2018 and given its representation on the Group my Department did not make a written submission.

The areas within the Department which have had the most contact with transgender customers are Client Identity Services for the issue of Gender Recognition Certificates and the General Registers Office in relation to issuing a new birth certificate from the register of gender recognition. Contact by transgender customers is with a small team of experienced and sensitive staff members who deal with these applications in a confidential and supportive manner. The staff have been praised by the transgender community for the sensitive and efficient way in which applications are processed and handled.

Guidance to be put in place for staff in my department regarding transgender matters and their engagement with customers will reflect the sensitive nature of the individual’s situation and best practice in terms of customer service delivery.

Central guidance is a matter for the Chief Human Resources Officer for the Civil Service.

Water Conservation Grant Applications

287. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a water conservation grant for persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7608/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Statutory Instrument 434 of 2015 provided for the extension of the deadline for the submission of a completed application for the Water Conservation Grant to the Department of Social Protection from 8th October 2015 to 22nd October 2015.

An application was made in respect of the details provided for the first named person and property using the online application system available at that time. This payment was made to that person's nominated account on 30th September 2015. However, there is no record of an application having been made in respect of the details provided for the second named person prior to the deadline of 22nd October 2015. With regard to WPRN and account numbers, these details were provided by Irish Water to each householder when they registered with it. Irish Water should be able to give these details again to the persons concerned on request.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Data Protection

288. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which the public services card data is collected, stored and processed; if the card will be compliant with the general data protection regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7612/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Section 263 of the Social Welfare Consolidation, Act (as amended) provides that:

(a) the following information is inscribed on the Public Services Card (PSC): forename, surname, Personal Public Service (PPS) Number, photograph, signature, card issue number and expiry date; and

(b) the following information is encoded on the chip of the PSC: forename, surname, date of birth, place of birth, sex, nationality, former surnames (if any), mother's former surnames (if any), photograph, signature, issue number of the PSC, and expiry date of the PSC.

The above data (apart from the issue number and expiry date of the PSC) is part of the Public Service Identity (PSI) dataset as set out in section 262 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended).

Section 262 also sets out how the sharing and use of the PSI data is restricted to public service bodies specified in law or their agents. Designation as a specified body requires primary legislation and as such can only be done by an Act of the Oireachtas.

The full PSI dataset consists of the surname; forename; date of birth; place of birth; sex; all former surnames (if any); all former surnames (if any) of his or her mother; address; nationality; date of death; certificate of death, where relevant; where required, a photograph of the person, except where the person is deceased; where required, the person's signature, except where the person is deceased; any other information as may be required for authentication purposes that is uniquely linked to or is capable of identifying that person; and any other information that may

be prescribed which, in the opinion of the Minister, is relevant to and necessary for the allocation of a personal public service number.

Section 262 provides that PSI data can only be used by a specified body for authenticating the identity of an individual with whom it has a transaction and in performing its public functions insofar as those functions relate to the person concerned. In addition, where a specified body collects any element of PSI data from a person, that information shall also be collected for the purpose of maintaining the person's public service identity. The Data Protection Acts as amended, Subsection 1 c iii of Section 2A, also provide for personal data to be processed on condition that "the processing is necessary for the performance of a function of the Government or a Minister of the Government".

Given its wide range of schemes, services and payments, the Department collects and holds large volumes of personal data on customers and is very aware of the need to have adequate data protection policies, procedures and structures in place in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Department has established a GDPR implementation team which is undertaking a major programme of work to ensure compliance with the GDPR. This implementation programme is overseen by the Department's Data Management Programme Board. Additionally, specific GDPR training and awareness is being provided by the GDPR implementation team and a specialist external training company to staff and senior managers across the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Rates

289. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost to the Exchequer and the Social Insurance Fund in a full year if all PRSI benefits available to employed persons on class A PRSI were extended to the self-employed without a change of the rates currently charged. [7616/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Self-employed workers who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year, are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum annual payment of €500. This provides them with access to the following benefits: State pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory), guardian's payment (contributory), maternity benefit, adoptive benefit, paternity benefit and treatment benefit (from March 2017). Entitlement to invalidity pension was extended to the self-employed from 1st December 2017.

This compares favourably with employees who, in general, are liable to the Class A rate of 4%. In addition their employers are liable to PRSI at the rate of 8.6% on weekly earnings up to and including €376 or at the rate of 10.85% where weekly earnings exceed €376. Accordingly the combined rate of PRSI rate paid in respect of Class A employees is 12.6% or 14.85%, depending on the level of weekly earnings. These Class A employees are entitled to the full range of social insurance benefits.

The issue of extending additional social insurance benefits to the self-employed paying Class S PRSI was considered in the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance fund (SIF) as at 31 December, 2015, which I published on 18 October 2017. The Review, required by legislation, was carried out by independent consultants, KPMG. It examines the projected income and expenditure of the SIF over the course of the 55 year period from 2016 to 2071.

The Review found that the fund currently has a modest surplus of income over expenditure.

In 2016 there was a surplus of €0.4 billion on expenditure of €8.8 billion and receipts of €9.2 billion. However, this will reduce and will return to a small shortfall in 2020. The annual shortfalls are projected to increase from 2021 onwards as the ageing of the population impacts. Projections indicate that, in the absence of further action to tackle the shortfall, the excess of expenditure over income of the fund will increase significantly over the medium to long term. The shortfall in expenditure over income is projected to increase from €0.2 billion in 2020 to €3.3 billion by 2030 and to €22.2 billion by 2071. It should be noted that as self-employed workers became eligible to apply for invalidity pension from December 2017, the cost of this introduction has been factored into the Actuarial Review.

As part of the Review the independent consultants were required to project the additional PRSI expenditure if invalidity pension and illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits were extended to Class S self-employed workers and the PRSI contribution rates required to provide these benefits on a revenue neutral basis.

The Review found that the combined cost of introducing the invalidity, illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits for class S contributions is estimated to be €118 million in 2018, rising steadily to €223 million in 2020. By 2025 the projected cost is €413 million and, over the period of the review the cost would rise to €1.3 billion in 2071.

It should be noted that the projected expenditure on jobseeker's benefit assume the same incidence rate as prevail in the employed (PRSI Class A) population. The following table gives a breakdown of the costs of the individual benefits:

Projected costs of extending Invalidity Pension, Illness Benefit, Jobseekers Benefit, Carer's Benefit (€m)

Year	Invalidity	Illness	Jobseeker's	Carer's	Total
2017	3	0	0	0	3
2018	30	40	45	2	118
2019	59	54	58	3	173
2020	87	72	60	4	223
2021	125	88	63	5	281
2022	152	94	67	5	317
2023	176	99	71	5	351
2024	198	104	75	6	382
2025	218	108	81	6	413

The Review indicates that, where these benefits are extended to the self-employed, the Class S rate of PRSI contribution would need to increase substantially in order to ensure that the benefits are delivered in a revenue neutral manner. It estimates that when expenditure on the additional benefits is considered over the entire projection period, PRSI rates would need to increase by 94% under a scenario of no subvention from the exchequer. This is equivalent to an increase of the Class S contribution rate from the current 4% rate to 7.8%.

This increased contribution is attributable to the costs of extending these additional benefits to PRSI Class S contributors. It does not take account of the value to PRSI Class S contributors of access to the range of existing benefits, and in particular State pension (contributory).

The consultants estimated that the typical cost of State pension (contributory) on its own is of the order of 10% to 15%, depending on other factors including rate of average earnings and date of commencing paying PRSI. Adding in the other benefits referenced the total Class S rate

of contribution to ensure revenue neutrality would be of the order of 20% per annum.

The findings of the Review will play an important role in informing the overall debate on policy developments in relation to the Social Insurance Fund in the years ahead including the financial sustainability of the Fund given the expected demographic challenges and consideration of extending the scope of benefits for workers generally, including the self-employed.

Data Protection

290. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the preparedness of her Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in her Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7645/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) comes into effect on the 25th May 2018. This is the one of most significant developments in European data protection law in over 30 years. The GDPR strengthens the rights of data subjects and will have many implications for my Department.

Accordingly, the Department has established a dedicated unit to prepare for the implementation of the GDPR and the work of this unit is overseen by a high level Data Management Programme Board.

The GDPR unit has a number of work streams to work through to ensure a smooth transition once the GDPR comes into effect. While my Department already has strict data protection guidelines, policies and procedures, all are being reviewed and updated to ensure that the processing of all personal data is GDPR compliant before 25 May. All data sharing arrangements are also being reviewed to ensure compliance with the Regulation.

The GDPR unit is finalising a training and awareness programme through which over 6,500 staff will be advised of the key impacts of the GDPR. The awareness programme has already commenced with an initial article on GDPR last October for the Data Protection Awareness Week which issued to all staff.

More recently, a series of GDPR briefing sessions has been given to more than 600 staff and a series of business level meetings took place with some of the major processors of personal data. These will continue over the coming weeks and months. In addition, my Department is committed to delivering GDPR training to all staff in advance of the 25 May implementation date.

Exceptional Needs Payment Appeals

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if eligibility for an exceptional needs payment in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7743/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Determinations made by Designated Persons in relation to claims made under Section 201 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation Act) 2005, i.e. Exceptional Needs Payments can be reviewed by a SWA Reviewing Officer under Section 323 of that Act.

As the Deputy has requested that a review be conducted, the relevant review officer has been notified of your request and they will now commence the review process. Once the review has been completed, the outcome of the review will be communicated to the person concerned and the Deputy.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Appeals

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if eligibility for an exceptional needs payment in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7761/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Determinations made by Designated Persons in relation to claims made under Section 201 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation Act) 2005, i.e. Exceptional Needs Payments can be reviewed by a SWA Reviewing Officer under Section 323 of that Act.

As the Deputy has requested that a review be conducted, the relevant review officer has been notified of your request and they will now commence the review process. Once the review has been completed, the outcome of the review will be communicated to the person concerned and the Deputy.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

293. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) who was on the transition pension prior to the changes being introduced in respect of eligibility for the State contributory pension in 2013 can obtain the rate that was effective at the time the person went on the transition pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7763/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Prior to reaching age 66, the person concerned was in receipt of a mixed insurance pro rata state pension (transition), based on a combination of full-rate and modified contributions. The person concerned is currently in receipt of state pension (contributory) with effect from 19 April 2013, their 66th birthday.

According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a social insurance record of 1,152 reckonable paid and credited contributions. They are in receipt of a reduced state pension (contributory) at the correct rate based on an assessed yearly average of 23 contributions, covering the period from October 1963 to end-December 2012 inclusive.

The person concerned received their correct rate of mixed insurance pro rata state pension (transition) and is currently in receipt of their correct rate of state pension (contributory) based on their contribution history held by my Department.

If the person concerned considers they have additional contributions that have not been recorded, it is open to them to forward documentary evidence of any missing periods of employment to my Department and their pension entitlement will be reviewed. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

294. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the home care credits in the total contributions approach to be adopted in 2020 will be allocated in the same way that unemployment credits are, that is, in the same contribution year a person can have a mix of paid contributions and home care credits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7769/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 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. Unlike the current Homemakers scheme, this credit will apply to periods both before and after 1994. 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 such pensioners 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, and it also acknowledges, for the first time, the contribution made by home-carers in the period before 1994.

The TCA model proposed for post-2020 pensioners has yet to be decided upon, as the Government proposal will not be finalised until after a public consultation later this year. There are a number of factors, not just the number of years required for a full pension, which influence outcomes, and I will consider very carefully the priorities identified by stakeholders in that consultation process.

Accordingly, the policy regarding Home-Caring credits has also not been finalised. However, it is my intention that it will be possible for Home-Caring credits to be allocated in the same year as paid contributions, where appropriate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer’s Allowance Eligibility

295. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7788/18]

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 fulltime care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

A person can be considered to be providing fulltime care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

Although the person concerned may not qualify for a Springboard course at present due to her caring requirements, it is still appropriate for my department to bring notice of these courses to the attention of lone parents in case their circumstances are due to change soon.

However all recipients of social welfare payments must abide by the conditions that attach to each scheme and recipients of carer's allowance cannot engage in employment, self-employment or training and education courses outside their home in excess of 15 hours per week.

Any increase in the hours allowed for engaging in these activities would dilute the definition of full-time care and attention which is integral to the scheme and my Department has no plans to do that at present.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

296. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the delay in processing a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) will be investigated. [7789/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): A review was carried out on this lady's disability allowance, DA. It was found that she had been absent from the state for an extended period and an overpayment was raised against her.

The person in question has lodged an appeal with the independent social welfare appeals office, SWAO. All the relevant papers requested by that office were submitted by my Department on 12 February 2018. The SWAO will be in touch with the person in due course in relation to the progress of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if in the determination of an application for a State pension by a person (details supplied) their entire working life was accounted for; if the application can be reviewed in view of these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7816/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To qualify for a contributory state pension a person must have at least 520 full rate paid contributions. According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a social insurance record of 412 reckonable contributions which is insufficient to qualify for the contributory pension. They have no recorded contributions for the tax years from 1975 to end December 2016 inclusive. The person was notified in writing of this decision on 12 June 2017. Attached to that letter was a copy of their contribution record, as held by my Department, upon which their entitlement was calculated.

If the person concerned considers they have additional contributions that have not been recorded, it is open to them to forward documentary evidence of the missing periods of employment to my Department and their pension entitlement will be reviewed.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government recently announced proposals that pensioners who qualified for contributory state pension since September 2012, and whose rate of entitlement was impacted by the 2012 rate band changes, may apply for a review to have their entitlement considered under a new total contribution approach, TCA. However, as the person

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concerned does not satisfy the minimum qualifying condition for contributory state pension, they will not be affected by this proposal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to an application for an exceptional needs payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7817/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was issued with a supplementary welfare allowance, SWA, exceptional needs payment application form on 6 February 2018. As of yet, the completed application form, together with any supporting documentation that may be required, has not yet been received by the designated person.

Once a completed application form has been received it will be processed as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Widow's Pension Applications

299. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to an application for a widower's pension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7818/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the records of my Department, an application for widow, widower or survivor's contributory pension has not been received from the person concerned to date. The person's entitlement can only be assessed on receipt of a completed application form.

Application forms for both widow, widower or survivor's contributory pension and one-parent family payment, to which the person may have an entitlement, have been issued to the person concerned.

On receipt of a complete application form a deciding officer will assess the person's entitlement and notify them in writing of the decision without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Water Quality

300. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the work being carried out to monitor and maintain water quality in the Lee catchment area in County Cork especially with regard to the prevention of human and animal waste entering the river catchment and the treatment of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7770/18]

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

The Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, oversees national programmes of monitoring and reporting on the quality of rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters and groundwater, including in relation to the Lee, Cork Harbour and Youghal Bay catchment. The EPA's most recent published report in this regard is water quality in Ireland 2010 to 2015, which is available at the following link: www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/waterqua/waterqualityinireland2010-2015.html.

A range of measures to maintain and enhance water quality is set out in Ireland's draft river basin management plan, RBMP, 2018 to 2021 which was published in February 2017 pursuant to the EU Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) for a mandatory six-month public consultation exercise. The draft RBMP, which is available at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/river-basin-management-plans/public-consultation-draft-river-basin-management>, sets out national programmes of measures to meet the environmental objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive, including preventing the deterioration of water bodies and protecting, enhancing and restoring them to at least good status. The draft RBMP is currently being finalised, and I intend to publish the final plan in April 2018.

In respect of urban waste water pressures on water bodies, the principal measure involves compliance with the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (Council Directive 91/271/EEC) and compliance with the EPA's discharge license emission limit values. Investment for the period to 2021 has been prioritised by Irish Water based on ensuring appropriate levels of treatment for compliance with emission limit values, meeting the requirements for protected areas, and the elimination of raw sewage discharges where they occur.

With regard to domestic waste water treatment system pressures on water bodies, an important measure is the domestic waste water treatment provisions included in the Water Service (Amendment) Act 2012, which govern the operation and maintenance of such systems, as well as the associated risk-based inspection regime.

As for risks to water bodies from animal waste, the primary agricultural measure to support water quality is the Nitrates Regulations, the European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, and the associated Nitrates Action Programme, prepared pursuant to the EU Nitrates Directive, Council Directive 91/676/EEC concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources. Ireland's fourth Nitrates Action Programme 2018 to 2021 focuses, inter alia, on intercepting and breaking nutrient transport pathways and preventing sediment and nutrient losses to waters.

Gender Recognition

301. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if his Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7572/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While my Department has not provided specific training or guidelines for staff in relation to transgender matters, all staff are aware of and adhere to the 2015 Dignity at Work policy and we ensure that dignity is afforded to all transgender customers and staff of the Department. My Department has not made a submission to the review group but we await the outcome of their review and will engage in relation to any recommendations which may arise from it.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

302. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the delegated sanctions to Limerick City and County Council to hire extra outdoor staff in order to repair roads in County Limerick in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 and to date in 2018. [7593/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I have delegated authority to the chief executive of Limerick City and County Council to fill any vacancy that arises in the context of their outdoor and indoor workforce plans.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, it is the chief executive of Limerick City and County Council who is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the Council. In this regard, the assignment of local authority staff to a particular function, such as roads repairs, is a matter for the chief executive.

Local Authority Finances

303. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position with local authority public liability insurance relating to a matter (details supplied). [7605/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local authorities are independent in the discharge of their functions and the directly elected members are democratically accountable for all expenditure of their authority. Specific details in relation to local authority public liability insurance are a matter for each individual local authority insofar as local authorities themselves organise their insurance arrangements collectively for the sector. I have no function in the arrangements involved.

Referendum Campaigns

304. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 309 of 7 February 2018, his plans to amend section 6 of the Referendum Act 1994 to ensure that notices, bills, posters and similar documents shall not contain untruths and-or graphic or obscene images; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7614/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Section 6 of the Referendum Act 1994 provides, inter-alia, that the provisions of section 140 of the Electoral Act 1992 (as amended) apply and have effect in relation to referenda. Section 140 of the Electoral Act provides that every notice, bill, poster or similar document having reference to a Dáil election or distributed for the purpose of furthering the candidature of any candidate at a Dáil election shall bear upon its face the name and address of the printer and of the publisher thereof. While electoral law is under ongoing review, I have no plans at this time to amend this provision.

Data Protection

305. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the preparedness of his Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in his Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7649/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently preparing for the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) with effect from 25 May 2018.

A Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been appointed in line with the requirements of Article 37 of the GDPR and this person will be responsible for overseeing the programme of work that will need to be undertaken to ensure that the Department is prepared for the introduction of the Regulation. The DPO will also be responsible for awareness raising in the Department, including ensuring adequate training supports are provided to staff.

To date, the DPO has undergone comprehensive training in data protection and senior managers in the Department have been briefed on the requirements of the GDPR. It is planned to roll out training on a wider level in the coming months.

Planning Issues

306. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the process on the new planning guidelines for wind farms (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7794/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is being undertaken on the revised Guidelines before they come into effect, in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, otherwise known as the SEA Directive.

SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process. Following a tendering process, my Department appointed SEA experts in December 2017 to assist in this regard. It is expected that a public consultation on the revised draft Guidelines, together with the comprehensive environmental report, will be undertaken during the first quarter of this year, with the aim of issuing the finalised Guidelines, following detailed analysis and consideration of the submissions and views received during the consultation phase, over the Summer.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts. In the meantime, the current 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines remain in force.

Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any case with which a planning authority or the Board is or may be involved. Therefore, I cannot comment on an individual planning case.

Gender Recognition

307. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department has prepared written guidelines for staff and the public on dealing with transgender matters; if they are published; if staff have received training in respect of this; if her Department is participating in or making a submission regarding the review being undertaken in respect of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7565/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department is not nominated to participate in the review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 being carried out at present by my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection. While staff of my Department are trained to deliver an appropriate level of customer service, written guidelines, for staff or the public, in dealing with transgender matters have not been prepared.

All staff in my Department are, of course, obliged to treat their colleagues and members of the public with dignity and respect in accordance with the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour. The Code, which is signed by all staff, provides for non-discrimination under the nine specified grounds as stated in the Equality Act 2004, which includes gender. In addition, my Department is committed to the Dignity at Work Policy for the Civil Service which aims to promote respect, dignity, safety, and equality in the workplace.

Since it came into operation, no issues relating to the Gender Recognition Act 2015 have been brought to the Department's attention by staff, managers or any representative bodies or trade unions. In the event of an issue being brought to my Department's attention it will be treated in accordance with the Act.

Greenways Development

308. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of her plans for a Grand Canal greenway between Hazelhatch, County Kildare, and Grange Castle, Dublin 22, (details supplied) in view of the fact that there is reference to the project as an objective in a number of local area plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7617/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Waterways Ireland is responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of 1,000 km of the inland navigable waterway system throughout the island, principally for recreational purposes. This is a significant recreational resource and Waterways Ireland has been proactive in the development of Blueways and Greenways as a means to attract new visitors and in response to the growth for recreational activities such as walking, canoeing and cycling.

Waterways Ireland is committed to supporting the development of the entire Grand Canal tow path into a high quality off road walking and cycling amenity.

I am informed that there have been initial discussions between Waterways Ireland and South Dublin County Council regarding the extension of the Greenway between the 12th Lock, Castleknock and Hazelhatch, a distance of 4.6km.

I am also informed that this proposed project would be led by South Dublin County and Waterways Ireland will assist its delivery in any way possible and it is actively working with local authorities and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that all of the canal

towpaths are developed.

Data Protection

309. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the preparedness of her Department in the context of the incoming general data protection regulation, GDPR, EU 2016/679; if staff in her Department have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing on the GDPR; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7642/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Arising from the coming into effect of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May of this year my Department is conducting a review of its holdings of personal data and the associated arrangements for filing and processing of such material.

As required by the GDPR, a Data Protection Officer (DPO) has been appointed and among their responsibilities will be the oversight of preparations for the transition to the new regulatory regime. As the Deputy is aware my Department is already subject to existing Data Protection regulatory provisions.

While a number of staff in key areas have already been facilitated in attending training in relation to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) I am advised that a more broadly based approach to awareness raising and training will form a key element of preparations over the coming months.

Heritage Sites

310. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a building (details supplied) will be protected in view of the fact that the building is of historical interest and part of the heritage in the area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7699/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am aware of concerns locally about the condition of the building in question, which I understand is in private ownership.

My role as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, in relation to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

The main mechanism for the protection of our architectural heritage is inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS), which is a reserved function of the relevant planning authority. The recording of buildings in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), which is maintained by my Department, forms the basis of recommendations to local authorities for inclusion of structures on their RPS.

The building mentioned by the Deputy is rated in the NIAH as being of Regional significance. It was recommended for inclusion in the RPS, and has been added to the RPS by the planning authority. As such, the building is a protected structure within the meaning of the Planning and Development Acts.

Inclusion on the RPS places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected struc-

tures. They are legally required to make sure that the structure does not become endangered through neglect, decay, damage or harm.

Inclusion on the RPS also gives planning authorities a number of powers to deal with such structures and safeguard their future. If a protected structure is endangered, the planning authority can serve a notice on the owner or occupier, requiring them to carry out any work that it considers necessary to protect it.

Financial support is provided by my Department through a number of schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings. These schemes are administered via the local authorities and include the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund. Details of the schemes are available on all local authority websites and on my Department's website.