

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 12 to 26, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 27 to 32, inclusive, answered orally.

Project Ireland 2040

33. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the concept of the Atlantic economic corridor and its development is provided for in the Project Ireland 2040 plan which encompasses the national planning framework and the national development plan. [8501/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The overarching objective of the Atlantic Economic Corridor proposal is to maximise the assets along the western seaboard and connect the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life.

Project Ireland 2040 fully supports the development of the AEC and specifically highlights the contribution that the AEC can make to achieving the regional growth objectives of the National Planning Framework. Furthermore, the identification in the NPF of Sligo and Letterkenny as regional growth centres, along with Limerick and Galway cities, means that there will be a strong network of towns and cities along the Corridor to help drive the future development of the AEC.

The National Development Plan, which sets out the Government's capital investment priorities to 2027, includes commitments to a number of infrastructural projects which will help to support the development of the AEC region, with a particular emphasis on improving access to the North-West. The Atlantic Road Corridor is also referenced as a particular priority, linking Cork, Limerick, Galway and Sligo. Other investment commitments in the Plan in relation to rural development, education and innovation and compact growth, will also benefit the AEC region as a whole.

In order to support the development of the AEC, I have offered to co-fund the appointment of an AEC Officer in each of the Local Authorities along the Corridor. The role of these officers will be to support the work of the Taskforce which was established to progress the AEC proposal, and which I chair. The AEC Officer network will also ensure a coordinated approach in each Local Authority area to developing the concept.

Questions Nos. 34 to 39, inclusive, answered orally.

Voluntary Sector

40. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on the progress of preparing a national strategy for volunteering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8517/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Supporting the role of volunteers in our society is an important element of my Department's work in developing vibrant, sustainable and inclusive communities. The Government recognises the importance and worth of every type of volunteering activity, irrespective of its scale or the sector involved. The ongoing and future development of volunteering is key to ensuring that the sector continues to thrive and that we all benefit from the social enrichment that volunteering provides.

The current policy on volunteering is set out in the White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity, published in 2000, and the subsequent report by the National Committee on Volunteering, "Tipping the Balance". Much has changed in Irish society since then and we need to ensure that our volunteering policy is fit for purpose to support the sector into the future.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department has commenced exploratory discussions with stakeholders on the need to review the current policy and develop a new national vision and action plan for volunteering in Ireland. This will ensure that our volunteering policy meaningfully supports the on-going development of this important sector.

My officials will be reporting to me later this year with recommendations on how a new national strategy should be developed in partnership with the relevant stakeholders.

Project Ireland 2040

41. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the development of the Atlantic economic corridor (AEC); his views on the relationship of the AEC and the Project Ireland 2040 plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8518/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both commit to progressing the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor. In line with this commitment, Minister Michael Ring established the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce in March 2017, and I now chair this Taskforce.

The overarching objective of the AEC proposal is to maximise the assets along the western seaboard and connect the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life. The Taskforce meets on a regular basis and has established a number of sub-Groups to assist it in its work.

Project Ireland 2040 fully supports the development of the AEC and specifically highlights the contribution that the AEC can make to achieving the regional growth objectives of the National Planning Framework. The designation of Sligo and Letterkenny as regional growth centres, along with Limerick and Galway cities, also strengthens the AEC concept by providing a coherent network of NPF growth centres along the corridor.

The National Development Plan includes commitments to a number of infrastructural proj-

ects which will help to support the development of the AEC region, with a particular emphasis on improving access to the North-West. Other investment commitments in the Plan in relation to rural development, education and innovation and compact growth, will also benefit the AEC region as a whole.

In order to support the development of the AEC, I have offered to co-fund the appointment of an AEC Officer in each of the Local Authorities along the Corridor. This will provide a dedicated resource in each Authority to support the work of the AEC Taskforce and its subgroups, and to promote the AEC concept within each Local Authority area and across the region as a whole.

Dormant Accounts Fund

42. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the statutory review as required by the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012 of the disbursements scheme in relation to the dormant accounts funds due in December 2016; his plans to carry out such a review; if the review has commenced; if not, the reason therefor; if the review has been completed; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8725/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The legislation governing the Dormant Accounts Funds provides a framework for the disbursement of funds for measures targeted at socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged people, and people with a disability.

The principles underlying the allocation of funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund and the strategic objectives to be pursued by measures nominated for funding by Government Departments are set out in three-year Disbursement Schemes. The most recent Disbursement Scheme, covering the period 2017-2019 inclusive, was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in May 2017.

This month my Department commenced a full review of the Disbursement Scheme 2013-2016. This review, which will be completed by the end of June 2018, will set out to improve the administrative procedures governing Dormant Accounts funding to maximise the effectiveness with which funds are distributed in order to better support the people and communities at whom the funding is aimed.

The review will involve extensive engagement with other Government Departments who run programmes under the Dormant Accounts Fund, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the National Treasury Management Agency and other relevant stakeholders, including community representatives. The findings of the review will inform future Dormant Account Disbursement Schemes and future Dormant Account Action Plans.

Questions Nos. 43 to 45, inclusive, answered orally.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

46. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of underspent funds that were allocated to the towns and villages schemes; and if there will be a similar type of scheme in 2018. [8513/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action

Plan for Rural Development contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in April last year, with a focus on projects which could stimulate and encourage economic activity in our rural towns and villages.

Following a competitive process, in October 2017 I announced the allocation of €21.6 million to 281 projects in towns and villages across rural Ireland. To date, €1.16m of this funding has been drawn-down by Local Authorities.

It is important to note that the 2017 Scheme was expected to operate over a 12-15 month period. Therefore, it was always anticipated that a significant portion of the funds allocated would be drawn-down in 2018/2019 but only when the draw-down conditions are met, including the full completion of works which is required for final payments to issue.

Under Budget 2018 I secured a funding allocation of €15M for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and officials are currently reviewing the scheme criteria with a view to launching the 2018 scheme during April. The deputy should note that I recently wrote to all Local Authorities advising them of an indicative schedule of scheme launch dates in respect of the Local Improvement, CLÁR, Town and Village Renewal and the Rural Recreation schemes.

CLÁR Programme

47. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the CLÁR programme will reopen; the budget of the programme for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8516/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is a targeted investment programme which provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population decline.

The programme was originally launched in 2004, but was closed to new applications in 2009. I announced the reopening of the CLÁR Programme in October 2016. CLÁR 2016 provided funding for three measures, Safety Measures for Schools and Community/Sports Facilities, Playgrounds and Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA) and Local Access Roads. Following an assessment of the applications received I announced funding of €8.24 million to 651 successful projects under the programme in December 2016.

The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched in March 2017 and The allocation for CLÁR for 2017 was €5 million and funding was available under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure Needs

Measure 4: First Response Support Measure

Applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3 were submitted through the Local Authorities. Measure 4 was targeted at voluntary organisations involved in emergency rescue or first response

efforts. The Department received 438 applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3 and 81 applications under Measure 4.

In May 2017 I announced €1.21 million to the successful applicants (organisations) under measure 4 First Response Support. This was a very successful measure that provided support for organisations that are involved in a voluntary capacity to respond to emergency situations in CLÁR areas all over Ireland.

I subsequently announced €768K in funding for measure 3 Targeted Community Infrastructure. This funding provided support for the renovation and upgrade of community infrastructure.

I also announced €2.7M for successful applicants under Measure 1 Safety Measures for Schools and €2.2M for measure 2 Play Areas. This brings the total funding allocated under CLÁR in 2017 to €6.91M for 231 projects across the 4 measures.

The CLÁR programme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, and makes a huge contribution to supporting the most depopulated areas in rural Ireland. Over 800 projects have now been approved for funding since the scheme was re-launched last year.

I have secured an allocation of €5m for CLÁR for 2018. I propose to launch a further round of the CLÁR programme in March and I will be considering the measures to be supported over the coming weeks

Broadband Service Provision

48. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on plans to extend high speed broadband to all rural areas in the south Dublin County Council area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8742/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): 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, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. 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.

In April 2017 the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DC-CAE) published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available on his Department's website, 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 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 Minister Naughten in April.

In the South Dublin County Council area 98% of premises fall into the BLUE area while 1% of premises are in the AMBER area. Approximately 1% of premises fall into the LIGHT BLUE area. Individuals can check which category their premises falls into accessing www.broadband.gov.ie and entering their eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map.

The DCCAE 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. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage. "Detailed Solutions" have been evaluated by the NBP specialist team. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder and contract signature. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion and a subsidy level is agreed by 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.

Local Authority Funding

49. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of the €28 million prepaid to local authorities at the end of 2016 that has not been spent to date by the local authorities on the projects for which it was approved, by local authority and type of project; the steps he has taken to ensure the moneys are either spent or repaid to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8714/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As part of the Government's programme to support rural development, a number of initiatives including CLÁR, the Rural Recreation Scheme, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, and REDZ (Rural Economic Development Zones) were launched during 2016. In general, these initiatives were implemented through the Local Authorities.

Payments of approximately €28 million were made to the Local Authorities in 2016 to deliver these schemes. All funding was provided on the basis of sanction received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and on foot of Funding Agreements signed with the Local Authorities.

I am providing the Deputy with a table which outlines the amount of funding provided to each Local Authority by programme in 2016 and the most up to date expenditure information available in respect of each scheme. The figures reflect the position to the end of December 2017. It should be noted that not all Local Authorities applied for, or were eligible for, every scheme.

My Department is continuing to work closely with all relevant Local Authorities to ensure that any remaining funding allocated to them is spent early in 2018 and in accordance with the original project proposals.

County	Total amount disbursed REDZ 2016	REDZ 2016 Total Department REDZ Grant spent by LA at the 31 Dec 2017	Total amount paid Town and Village Renewal Scheme	Town and Village Total Department Grant spent by LA at the 31 Dec 2017
Carlow	€200,000.00	€125,388.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Cavan	€200,000.00	€112,500.00	€380,000.00	€343,750.00
Clare	€200,000.00	€161,344.00	€380,000.00	€374,962.00
Cork	€248,000.00	€186,994.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Donegal	€298,000.00	€206,470.00	€380,000.00	€0.00
Dublin FINGAL DLR	€0.00	€0.00	€380,000.00	€312,204.00
Galway	€100,000.00	€19,190.00	€380,000.00	€360,806.00
Kerry	€150,195.00	€150,195.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Kildare	€100,000.00	€85,998.00	€380,000.00	€151,638.00
Kilkenny	€200,000.00	€200,000.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Laois	€200,000.00	€172,592.00	€380,000.00	€249,379.00
Leitrim	€300,000.00	€235,177.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Limerick	€300,000.00	€79,000.00	€380,000.00	€285,650.00
Longford	€350,000.00	€330,588.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Louth	€100,000.00	€5,194.56	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Mayo	€150,000.00	€138,331.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Meath	€200,000.00	€151,542.00	€380,000.00	€337,270.00
Monaghan	€290,000.00	€290,000.00	€380,000.00	€377,324.00
Offaly	€414,870.00	€227,000.00	€380,000.00	€285,000.00
Roscommon	€100,000.00	€100,000.00	€380,000.00	€297,803.00
Sligo	€800,000.00	€570,000.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Tipperary	€699,221.00	€325,506.00	€380,000.00	€342,991.00
Waterford	€100,000.00	€100,000.00	€380,000.00	€380,000.00
Westmeath	€192,000.00	€125,760.00	€380,000.00	€313,400.00
Wexford	€100,000.00	€100,000.00	€380,000.00	€321,759.00
Wicklow	€150,556.00	€21,304.00	€380,000.00	€352,000.00
Sub Total	€6,142,842.00	€4,220,073.56	€9,880,000.00	€8,505,936.00

table contd.

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County	Total amount disbursed CLAR 2016 Scheme	Total Department Grant spent by LA at the 31 Dec 2017 CLÁR (total of 3 measures)	Total amount disbursed Rural Recreation Scheme Local Authorities 2016	Rural Rec Total Department Grant spent by LA at the 31 Dec 2017
Carlow	€80,000.00	€80,000	€67,500.00	€37,134.05
Cavan	€498,184.00	€433,482	€45,567.00	€45,567.00
Clare	€284,000.00	€284,000	€255,625.20	€203,151.00
Cork	€562,222.40	€419,612	€417,815.15	€379,580.05
Donegal	€878,632.54	€589,127	€67,991.00	€67,991.00
Dublin FINGAL DLR	€0.00	€0	€33,666.94	€31,341.21
Galway	€392,000.00	€363,826	€248,950.00	€107,170.63
Kerry	€744,964.00	€704,036	€288,000.00	€192,739.00
Kildare	€0.00	€0	€0.00	€0.00
Kilkenny	€223,000.00	€215,330	€0.00	€0.00
Laois	€148,900.00	€134,500	€256,000.00	€200,000.00
Leitrim	€274,800.00	€274,800	€480,000.00	€78,645.90
Limerick	€235,000.00	€235,000	€291,250.00	€291,250.00
Longford	€237,560.00	€225,832	€190,000.00	€190,000.00
Louth	€173,520.00	€156,768	€0.00	€0.00
Mayo	€976,869.00	€857,870	€455,000.00	€376,856.50
Meath	€127,600.00	€124,365	€50,000.00	€50,000.00
Monaghan	€356,440.00	€342,758	€273,014.00	€264,779.00
Offaly	€123,398.00	€123,400	€172,959.00	€11,143.00
Roscommon	€406,497.40	€394,529	€0.00	€0.00
Sligo	€598,400.00	€558,400	€42,562.50	€42,562.50
Tipperary	€371,000.00	€373,346	€85,208.00	€57,165.35
Waterford	€261,600.00	€237,900	€0.00	€0.00
Westmeath	€214,280.00	€170,279	€219,590.00	€219,590.00
Wexford	€0.00	€0	€189,455.00	€188,838.13
Wicklow	€70,000.00	€70,000	€0.00	€0.00
Sub Total	€8,238,867.34	€7,369,160	€4,130,153.79	€3,035,504.32

Community Banking

50. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the report on public banking based on the Sparkassen model will be considered; when it will be published; the roadmap for implementation of this initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8506/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit

Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks.

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

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

The Departmental officials have now finalised their report and have submitted their findings to the Minister for Finance and myself. It is intended that the report will be brought to Government for consideration in the next few weeks, with a view to publication shortly afterwards

Dog Breeding Industry

51. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department will liaise with local authorities and An Garda Síochána to ensure that the living conditions of dogs and pups on puppy farms is within the regulations and to enforce sanction or close down farms that are operating outside of the terms of their licence. [8723/18]

67. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when his Department will publish the final report on the review of dog breeding establishment guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8724/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 67 together.

Under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010, local authorities are responsible for the registration, inspection and regulation of dog breeding establishments within their functional areas. Furthermore, the enforcement of welfare standards regarding all animals, including dogs, is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

My Department has overall policy responsibility for the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010. Under the Act, Guidelines are in place for Dog Breeding Establishments and these are currently being revised by my Department. A draft was published as part of a public consultation process which ended in February 2017. The Department has completed its review of the submissions received and a Consultation Summary report, which provides a summary of the submissions made and details on the next steps in the process, has been published on my Department's website at <http://drcd.gov.ie/dog-control/>.

The next step in this process will be to produce revised Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, taking account of the submissions received. I expect to have these ready for my approval in Q2 of this year. Amendments to the relevant legislation, if necessary, will be progressed subsequently.

While the focus is currently on developing revised Guidelines, broader issues relating to enforcement of regulations and licence conditions were also raised in the course of the public consultation. I have asked my officials to consider whether further measures are required in these areas.

Service Level Agreements

52. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the service level agreement his Department has with Pobal; the payment policy his Department employs with Pobal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8515/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Pobal is a not-for-profit company which works on behalf of the Irish Government and European Union (EU) in managing programmes that contribute to social inclusion, equality and reconciliation. The Company operates under the aegis of my Department, which has an oversight and co-ordination role in respect of the company. A comprehensive structure is in place to govern the relationship between my Department and Pobal.

As a body under my Department's aegis, the overall governance arrangements between my Department and Pobal are set out in an overarching Service Level Agreement (SLA), as required by the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. In addition, there are programme-specific Service Agreements in place in respect of each individual programme which Pobal operates on my Departments behalf. The previous overarching SLA relating to Pobal was signed by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in July 2015 and expired in December 2017. My Department are currently in the process of finalising the text for the new overarching Service Level Agreement/Oversight Agreement with a view to signing same in the coming weeks. The previous SLA will remain in operation until the new agreement is concluded.

An additional framework Service Level Agreement is also in place which sets out the management and accountability framework in relation to both the LEADER programme and Dormant Accounts Fund measures. This agreement was put in place in November 2016 by the then Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and runs until 31st December 2020, unless renewed in the meantime.

With specific regard to Dormant Accounts, Pobal was engaged as the service provider for the Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2014. A service agreement between the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Pobal was put in place in April 2015 relating to the administration by Pobal of 8 measures under the 2014 Plan. The service agreement outlines the range of services to be provided by Pobal and the agreed payments to be made based on the projected levels of activity in each given year. The services provided by Pobal for specific schemes include detailed programme design, information events, application processes, application appraisal, contract administration and financial management.

A 2016 Dormant Accounts Action Plan was put in place in May 2016, again by the then Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government. A transfer of functions to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs subsequently took place in June 2016. Following this transfer of functions a service agreement was put in place for the administration of 4 measures under the 2016 Action Plan. This service agreement again outlines the agreed payments to be made based on services to be provided and the projected level of activity in each given year.

All payments made to Pobal in relation to the Dormant Accounts Fund are covered by the service agreements for the 2014 and 2016 Action Plans. To date, Pobal have not run any measures associated with the 2017 Action Plan. Pobal are currently progressing measures on the basis of funding allocations provided for in the 2016 Action Plan and the service agreement for this plan.

Dormant Accounts Fund

53. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the work carried out to date to establish the reason for the level of underspending by implementing Departments in relation to community programmes of the Dormant Accounts Fund; if such work has been undertaken; if not, the reason therefor; when he plans to undertake such work; the measures that have been taken or are planned to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8726/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The legislation governing the Dormant Accounts Funds provides a framework for the disbursement of funds for measures targeted at socially, economically and educationally disadvantage people, and people with a disability. The funding is allocated through a three-year Disbursement Scheme, underpinned by annual Action Plans which set out specific programmes to be funded each year.

My Department coordinates the preparation of the Disbursement Scheme and the Annual Action Plans across Government. Responsibility for this transferred to my Department in July 2017. The most recent Disbursement Scheme, covering the period 2017-2019 inclusive, was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in May 2017. Dormant Account Action Plans for 2014, 2016 and 2017 are currently operational.

The 2016 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General noted that the Statutory Review of the 2013-2016 Disbursement Scheme, which should have been completed by December 2016, was not carried out. The report recommended that this review be completed and that it should consider, inter alia, the reasons for the low level of disbursements under the scheme. The report also identified a number of reasons for the underspend, including delays in implementing programmes and a lower than expected level of uptake for some schemes.

My Department has commenced a full review of the Disbursement Scheme 2013-2016. This review, which will be completed by the end of June 2018, will set out to improve the administrative procedures governing Dormant Accounts funding to maximise the effectiveness with which funds are distributed in order to better support the people and communities at whom the funding is aimed. It will specifically address the issue of underspend and ensure improved administrative procedures are put in place to maximise the impact of available funds.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

54. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of local improvement scheme allocations to local authorities throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8740/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is a programme for improvement works on small private/non public roads and has been funded in the past by the Department of the Environment and Local

Government and subsequently by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

There has been very little funding available for this scheme in recent years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I therefore announced the provision of €10 million to Local Authorities for a Local Improvement Scheme last September. Based on demand and the capacity of Local Authorities to complete works before the end of 2017, I allocated an additional €7.4 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads at the end of November. The table outlines the funding allocated to each county under the LIS in 2017 and the final drawdown position at the end of the year.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland, and I have therefore secured an allocation of €10 million for the scheme in my Department's Estimate for 2018. I intend to announce details of the 2018 scheme including the allocations for each county shortly.

LIS 2017: Funding per County

County	LIS 2017 round 1 Allocations	LIS 2017 round 2 Allocation	Total allocation 1 & 2	Funding Drawn Down by LA
Carlow	€250,000	€190,460	€440,460	€440,460.00
Cavan	€295,000	€40,080	€335,080	€335,080.00
Clare	€482,000	€384,774	€866,774	€866,774.00
Cork	€1,000,000	€151,985	€1,151,985	€1,055,313.51
Donegal	€884,000	€2,500,000	€3,384,000	€3,061,655.90
Galway	€942,000	€426,651	€1,368,651	€1,368,651.00
Kerry	€727,000	€268,578	€995,578	€980,225.97
Kilkenny	€315,000	€290,565	€605,565	€598,079.00
Laois	€264,000	€548,270	€812,270	€756,789.91
Leitrim	€250,000	€237,947	€487,947	€487,947.00
Limerick*	€411,000	€0	€411,000	€544,860.50
Longford	€232,000	€70,443	€302,443	€302,443.00
Louth	€250,000	€0	€250,000	€249,999.75
Mayo	€855,000	€417,974	€1,272,974	€1,272,974.00
Meath	€359,000	€115,290	€474,290	€470,870.00
Monaghan	€250,000	€116,312	€366,312	€349,040.00
Offaly	€273,000	€403,155	€676,155	€676,155.00
Roscommon	€208,000	€213,258	€421,258	€421,258.00
Sligo	€282,000	€214,158	€496,158	€496,155.48
Tipperary**	€237,000	€0	€237,000	€244,329.00
Waterford	€282,000	€436,689	€718,689	€660,825.00
Westmeath	€282,000	€234,324	€516,324	€516,324.00
Wexford	€360,000	€134,493	€494,493	€494,493.00
Wicklow	€310,000	€0	€310,000	€310,000.00
Totals	€10,000,000	€7,395,406	€17,395,406	€16,960,703.02

Local Improvement Scheme Administration

55. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans for the LIS scheme 2018; the allocations to date, by county; his further plans for the scheme into the future in view of demand; if the provision of funding towards maintenance of LIS roads will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8505/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is a programme for improvement works on small private/non public roads and has been funded in the past by the Department of the Environment and Local Government and subsequently by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

There has been very little funding available for this scheme in recent years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I therefore announced the provision of €10 million to Local Authorities for a Local Improvement Scheme last September. Based on demand and the capacity of Local Authorities to complete works before the end of 2017, I allocated an additional €7.4 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads at the end of November.

The funding allocated through the LIS scheme is to support improvement works, and is based on previous guidelines governing the LIS, and in particular, the Local Improvement Scheme Memorandum 2002, issued by the then Department of the Environment and Local Government.

I have no plans at present to offer funding for the maintenance of LIS roads other than for improvement works as outlined in the 2002 memo.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland, and I have therefore secured an allocation of €10 million for the scheme in my Department's Estimate for 2018. I intend to announce details of the scheme, including county allocations, later this month.

Leader Programmes Funding

56. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding allocated to Leader programmes in counties Cavan and Monaghan in 2017; the level of funding to be provided for these programmes in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8703/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Leader is a multi-annual programme covering the period 2014-2020, with a total budget of €250 million over that period. €220 million of this funding has already been allocated to the Local Action Groups 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 Funding Agreements for delivery of the Leader Programme in the Cavan and Monaghan sub-regional areas were signed on 8 July 2016, with funding of approximately €8.5 million and €7.6 million respectively approved over the lifetime of the programme. The allocation for each Leader sub-regional area is provided for the duration of the programme rather than on an annual basis. This provides greater flexibility to the Local Action Groups in managing their resources.

A total of €40 million has been provided in the 2018 Estimates to support the Leader programme; reflecting voted provision of €35m supplemented by capital carryover of €5m.

I am satisfied this level of budgetary provision is in line with anticipated activity under the Leader Programme in 2018. My Department will be keeping this under review.

Dormant Accounts Fund Grants

57. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on the preparation of the dormant accounts action plan for 2018; if the process has commenced on seeking applications for consideration for disbursement; and if his Department is reviewing the operation of the Dormant Accounts Fund to ensure the efficient and effective allocation of funding in line with the aims of the legislation. [8500/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The legislation governing the Dormant Accounts Funds provides a framework for the disbursement of funds for measures targeted at socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged people, and people with a disability. The funding is allocated through a three-year Disbursement Scheme, underpinned by annual Action Plans which set out specific measures which may draw down from the Fund.

My Department coordinates the preparation of the Disbursement Scheme and the Annual Action Plans across Government. The preparation of the 2018 Action Plan has now commenced and I recently wrote to each Minister requesting that their Departments identify possible measures for inclusion in the Action Plan. My Department will review the submissions made by Departments in this regard and, upon completion of this process, I expect to be in a position to submit the final 2018 Action Plan to Government in May 2018.

In parallel with the development of the 2018 Action Plan, my Department has also commenced a review of the previous disbursement scheme which ran from 2014-2016. This review, which will be completed by the end of June 2018, will set out to improve the administrative procedures governing Dormant Accounts funding to maximise the effectiveness with which funds are distributed in order to better support the people and communities at whom the funding is aimed.

Dog Breeding Industry

58. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on the resources for inspections of dog breeding establishments; his further views on whether legislative change is required in relation to inspections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7155/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act, 2010, local authorities are responsible for the registration, inspection and regulation of Dog Breeding Establishments. Further, under the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for his or her own staffing and organisational arrangements, including for the inspection of dog breeding establishments.

My Department has overall policy responsibility for the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010. Under the Act, Guidelines are in place for Dog Breeding Establishments and these are currently being revised. A draft was published as part of a public consultation process which ended in February 2017. The Department has completed its review of the submissions received and a Consultation Summary report, which provides a summary of submissions and details on the next steps, has been published on my Department's website.

The next step will be to produce revised Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, taking account of the submissions received. I expect to have these ready for my approval in Q2 of this year. Amendments to the relevant legislation, if necessary, will be progressed subsequently.

While the focus is currently on developing revised Guidelines, broader issues relating to the resources necessary to carry out inspections were also raised in the course of the public consultation. I have asked my officials to consider whether further measures are required in these areas.

More generally, the enforcement of animal welfare standards for all animals is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Animal Health and Welfare Act. Both Departments work closely with each other to ensure a coordinated approach is taken in this area.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

59. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of the 2018 town and village renewal scheme; when it will be launched; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8738/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action Plan for Rural Development contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme focuses on projects which could stimulate and encourage economic activity in our rural towns and villages. Following a competitive process, in October 2017 I announced the allocation of €21.6 million to 281 projects in towns and villages across rural Ireland.

Under Budget 2018 I secured a funding allocation of €15M for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and officials are currently reviewing the scheme criteria with a view to launching the 2018 scheme during April. The deputy should note that I recently wrote to all Local Authorities advising them of an indicative schedule of scheme launch dates in respect of the Local Improvement, CLÁR, Town and Village Renewal and the Rural Recreation schemes.

Rural Recreation Scheme

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans for the rural recreation scheme 2018; the allocations and projects funded since 2016 under this or a similar heading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8736/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a series of measures to maximise Ireland's rural tourism and recreation potential in recognition of the contribution that these sectors make to rural economies. Actions under this Pillar are implemented across a number of Government Departments and agencies.

My own Department delivers a number of funding initiatives that support the development of rural recreational infrastructure and I will continue to deliver these initiatives in 2018.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme provides funding for the development of

new outdoor recreational infrastructure and for the maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure. In 2016 and 2017 the scheme facilitated the development of numerous greenways, blueways, walks and other trails across the country. This scheme will continue to support important local, regional and national rural recreation projects in 2018 and I will be launching the scheme in April.

In 2016, Rural Recreational funding of €7.4 million was approved for 117 projects to facilitate the development of new recreational facilities and the maintenance of existing recreational infrastructure throughout Ireland.

The 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme provided funding under the following measures;

Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing

Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail Development

Measure 3: Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategy Trail Development

Funding of €11.4M was allocated under Measure 1 and Measure 3 for a total of 219 projects. Additional funding of €2.2M was allocated in January 2018 under Measure 2 of the 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 32 projects.

Lists of all projects funded under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme can be found on my Department's website at

<http://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/rural-development/rural-recreation/>.

Departmental Contracts Data

61. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of contracts Pobal holds with Government Departments; the fees Pobal has received for these contracts for the most recently published year; if the contracts Pobal holds with Government Departments were awarded via a tendering process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8732/18]

62. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the contract his Department has in place with Pobal; the services Pobal provides on behalf of his Department; if the contract with Pobal was awarded following a tendering process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8731/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 62 together.

Pobal is a not-for-profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU. The Company operates under the aegis of my Department, which has an oversight and governance role.

The overall governance arrangements between my Department and Pobal are set out in a framework Service Level Agreement (SLA). In addition, there are programme-specific Service Agreements in place in respect of each individual programme which Pobal operates on my Department's behalf. The most recent framework SLA relating to Pobal was signed by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in July 2015 and expired in December 2017. My Department is currently in the process of finalising an updated SLA and

the previous SLA remains in operation until the new agreement is concluded.

Pobal currently has responsibility for delivery of approximately 25 programmes on behalf of four different Government Departments. The majority of the programmes operated by Pobal are managed on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs; other Government Departments who use Pobal's services are the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Health and my own Department. Each programme that Pobal manages and supports differs, as does the extent of Pobal's involvement. The company operates within programme-specific Service Agreements established with each individual Department. Each year the Company agrees a Programme of Work with each Government Department for any work they are requested to undertake.

With regard to procurement, legal advice was obtained a number of years ago from the Attorney General's Office to the effect that, due to the nature of its work which is exclusively on behalf of the State, Pobal was exempt from the requirements of the EU Procurement Directive. Accordingly, the services provided by Pobal on behalf of Government Departments in the management and operation of state funded programmes are not subject to a tendering process. Pobal are, however, subject to audit on an annual basis by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

In relation to fees, the most recent audited and published accounts of the company show that, in 2016, Pobal administered programmes to the value of approximately €428.4m and their administration budget was 4.65%. The details are set out in the table below. Pobal will publish details of 2017 service fees following the Annual General Meeting of its directors later this year.

Dept	Name of Programme	Fees€	Comment
DCYA/Atlantic Philanthropies	Area Based Childhood	360,000	Based on SLA
DCYA	Better Start Quality Development Service	2,905,000	Based on SLA
DCYA	Better Start Access and Inclusion Model	3,395,000	Based on SLA
DCYA	Community Childcare Subvention	1,632,323	Based on SLA
DCYA	Early Years Compliance	1,383,296	Based on SLA
DCYA	County Childcare Committee/Voluntary Childcare Organisations	1,027,232	Based on SLA
DCYA	Training and Employment Childcare scheme	756,201	Based on SLA
DCYA	Early Childhood Care and Education	861,960	Based on SLA
DCYA	Early Years Capital	500,681	Based on SLA
DCYA	Learner Fund	143,307	Based on SLA

Dept	Name of Programme	Fees€	Comment
DCYA	Early Childhood Care and Education Payments Expansion	343,982	Based on SLA
DCYA	Access and Inclusion Model Direct	575,000	Based on SLA
DCYA	Youth Services Grant Scheme	30,000	Based on SLA
DCYA	Comhairle na nOg	34,000	Based on SLA
DHPLCG	Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme	1,900,000	Based on SLA
DAHRRGA	Leader	1,025,000	Based on SLA
DSP	Community Services Programme	1,800,000	Based on SLA
DAHRRGA	Dormant Accounts Fund	200,000	Based on SLA
DSP	Rural Social Scheme	426,000	Based on SLA
DSP	Tús	1,706,000	Based on SLA
DSP	Gateway	527,000	Based on SLA
DHPCLG	Senior Alerts Scheme	331,000	Based on SLA
DHPCLG	Scheme to Support National Organisations	350,000	Based on SLA

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

63. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when a status and implementation report on the action plan for rural development will be provided; the main progress made in 2017; the expected progress in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8510/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017. The Plan contains over 270 actions for delivery across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other organisations to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland.

My Department has been liaising with our implementation partners since late last year with a view to compiling the second six-monthly Progress Report on the implementation of the Action Plan. The Monitoring Committee for the Action Plan will meet this week to consider the draft Progress Report and I expect to be in a position to publish the report in the coming weeks.

I intend that the Action Plan will continue to deliver progress on rural development issues across Government in 2018. In terms of actions being progressed by my own Department, I am pleased to report that many of the funding schemes run by my Department which were such an outstanding success in the first year of the Action Plan's implementation, such as Town and Village Renewal, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure, CLÁR, and the Local Improvement Scheme, will also be run again in 2018.

I would also note that the recently launched Project Ireland 2040, gives clear support to the objectives of the Action Plan for Rural Development. One of the ten strategic objectives set in the National Planning Framework is to ensure strengthened rural economies and communities. The NPF highlights both the continued potential of the traditional pillars of the rural economy as well as the opportunities that will arise through new technologies and investment.

In addition to funding across sectors such as transport, tourism, energy and communications, the National Development Plan commits to establishing a Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which will provide €1bn over ten years to support the sustainable growth of towns, villages and rural areas. This will support the achievement of the objective of strengthened rural economies and communities.

Regional Development Policy

64. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to commission data research and a deprivation analysis of the midlands counties in order to ascertain the validity of designating special status to a defined region and establishing a development commission. [8721/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Pobal HP deprivation index provides a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from various Censuses. The Pobal index is compiled at small area, county and regional level. As such it includes data for the Midlands region. Further information on this index, and the index data itself, is available at <https://www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx>.

With regard to the economic development of the midlands counties, the National Planning Framework provides for Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to be developed by each of the three regional assemblies. These strategies will set out the strategic development framework for each region including their towns, villages and rural catchments. They will be the key strategies in terms of setting out the future vision for economic and spatial development of the regions.

Leader Programmes Funding

65. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the LEADER funding which has been drawn down by groups in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8741/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Leader is a multi-annual EU co-funded programme to support rural development. Ireland has an allocation of €250 million under the programme over the period 2014-2020, including both national and EU funding. The programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area.

€220 million of the €250 million approved for Leader under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 has already been allocated to each LAG area. This allocation covers the full duration of the Programme as it provides greater flexibility to Local Action Groups in managing their allocation within and between years.

As has been the case under previous Leader Programmes, there is a natural lead-in period required where the Local Action Groups conclude calls for proposals and work with potential applicants to develop and finalise funding proposals which will ultimately be delivered in each area. This is consistent with the experience of other EU programmes.

Details of the allocations provided for the delivery of the Programme in each of the areas referred to by the Deputy is provided at Appendix 1 along with the details of the approvals issued and payments made by the respective Local Action Groups. No project expenditure has yet been incurred in the Cavan sub-regional area.

I anticipate that there will be a significant increase in project expenditure over the course of 2018 based on the progress which has been made by the LAGs in approving projects in recent months. My Department has also introduced a number of administrative improvements to the Leader programme which will also assist LAGs and project promoters in their delivery of the programme.

Leader project applications and approvals in Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath on 19th February 2018.

Sub-Regional areas	LEADER 2014-2020 Allocation	No. of Applications Received	Value of Applications Received	No. of Approvals issued	Value of Approvals	Value Project Claims
Cavan	8,522,285.84	19	893,733.54	15	827,390.54	0.00
Monaghan	7,592,719.51	25	2,340,118.35	18	999,107.82	74,987.23
Meath	6,903,123.57	10	274,676.15	9	258,857.56	16,497.70

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has budgeted for the LIS scheme in 2018; the demand for the scheme and financial allocations to date, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8735/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is a programme for improvement works on small private/non public roads and has been funded in the past by the Department of the Environment and Local Government and subsequently by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

There has been very little funding available for this scheme in recent years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I therefore announced the provision of €10 million to Local Authorities for a Local Improvement Scheme last September. Based on demand and the capacity of Local Authorities to complete works before the end of 2017, I allocated an additional €7.4 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads at the end of November.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland, and I have therefore secured an allocation of €10 million for the scheme in my Department's Estimate for 2018. I intend to announce details of the scheme, which will include individual county allocations, later this month.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 51.

Leader Programmes Funding

68. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding allocated for the Leader programme in 2017; the expenditure at the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8704/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Leader is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 which has a total budget of €250 million over the programming period. LEADER is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area.

€220 million of the available funding has already been allocated to the 28 Leader sub-regional areas throughout the country. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be delivered at a national level.

The allocation for each sub-regional area 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.

The original allocation for the Leader programme in 2017 was €40 million, as reflected in the Vote for the then Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Of this €40 million allocation, €17.4 million was transferred within my Department's budget to support a new Local Improvement Scheme to improve non-public roads, while €3.8 million was transferred to increase expenditure on developing Libraries in local communities.

The overall expenditure incurred under the 2014-2020 Leader Programme at the 31 December 2017 was €14,635,956.85. The figure includes expenditure on Preparatory Support, Administration (which includes Animation), and Project expenditure.

A total of €40 million has been provided in the 2018 Estimates to support the Leader programme; reflecting voted provision of €35m supplemented by capital carryover of €5m.

I am satisfied this level of budgetary provision is in line with anticipated activity under the Leader Programme in 2018. My Department will be keeping this under review.

Rural Broadband Scheme

69. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the role of his Department in the roll-out of rural broadband; the responsibilities he has in this area; the action he has planned; the progress made to date by the implementation group on the mobile phone and broadband taskforce report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8507/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department's mission is to provide a renewed focus on rural and community development in Ireland, and to put in place policy and supports to create vibrant and sustainable communities. The availability of a high quality, high speed broadband network is an essential component underpinning sustainable growth and development in rural communities.

In this regard, my officials are engaging with relevant stakeholders, including all local authorities, to identify and remove barriers to the rollout of telecommunications networks throughout rural Ireland.

Some key measures progressed during 2017 by my Department through the Mobile Phone and Broadband Implementation Group include:

- The assignment of a Broadband Officer in each local authority, co-funded by my Department. This is ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagement with telecoms operators and assisting in clearing obstacles to the rollout of telecoms infrastructure.

- Officials from my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment are working closely with mobile operators and local authorities to identify mobile phone blackspots areas, ascertain why these issues are arising, and identify solutions to improve coverage.

- My Department engages continuously with all 31 local authorities through the Northern and Southern Regional Action Groups to review and address barriers identified as impacting on the rollout of telecoms infrastructure.

- My Department co-hosted a national stakeholder forum in October bringing together key stakeholders to discuss issues impacting on the rollout of telecoms infrastructure.

The Implementation Review 2017, which was published this morning, outlines progress made during the course of 2017, and sets out a work programme of actions for implementation in 2018.

The Implementation Group will continue to meet in 2018 to drive progress on implementing measures which will have a direct impact on the quality of mobile and broadband services throughout the country.

Community Services Programme

70. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of new programmes he plans to fund with the community services programme in 2018; if current service providers will continue to be funded; the timeframe for the next submission of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8509/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports 425 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions. The CSP budget for 2018 is €46.2m.

Last week I approved total funding of €815,000 for 12 social enterprises providing employment to specific disadvantaged groups. This funding was allocated on foot of a call for applications issued in 2017 under Strand 3 of the programme. I expect to approve funding for a small number of additional social enterprises during the year as space and funding becomes available as part of the ongoing management of the programme.

Existing social enterprises will continue to be funded under the programme subject to the completion of the rolling three-year CSP contracting process. Around 120 organisations will complete this process in 2018 and will be re-contracted subject to continued fit and compliance with programme criteria.

Leader Programmes Administration

71. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the implementation of the programme for Government commitment on the Leader programme. [8711/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The LEADER programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area. €220 million of the €250 million approved for Leader under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 has already been allocated to each LAG area. This allocation covers the full duration of the Programme as it provides greater flexibility to Local Action Groups in managing their allocation within and between years.

As has been the case under previous Leader Programmes, there is a natural lead-in period required where the Local Action Groups conclude calls for proposals and work with potential applicants to develop and finalise funding proposals which will ultimately be delivered in each area. This is consistent with the experience of other EU programmes.

I believe that we are coming near the end of this lead in period. I anticipate that there will be a significant increase in project expenditure over the course of 2018 based on the progress which has been made by the LAGs in approving projects in recent months

My Department has also introduced a number of administrative improvements to the Leader programme which will also assist LAGs and project promoters in their delivery of the programme. In fact the effect of these changes is already evident as approximately €5 million has been approved for projects to date in 2018 compared with less than €1 million in the first six months of 2017.

I am confident that progress now being made by the LAGs, along with the administrative changes introduced in 2017, will result in a continued increase in project approvals and substantial payments under the Leader programme over the coming months.

Brexit Issues

72. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the Copenhagen economic report; the role his Department officials will have in responding to same; and the plans they are working on and co-ordinating across Departments. [8467/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for Brexit, I have responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit, which is being advanced through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department which bring together the results of the detailed work which is being undertaken by individual Departments.

This work draws on the analysis of the economic and sectoral impacts of various Brexit scenarios being taken forward by individual Departments and agencies, as well as by stakeholder organisations, academics and others. This includes the Copenhagen Economics report on *Strategic Implications for Ireland arising from changing EU-UK Trading Relations*, which was commissioned by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. This authoritative and independent report sets out the possible economic consequences, both macro-economic and sectoral, of various Brexit scenarios. It will help in the further preparation of our priorities for the negotiations and the consideration of possible additional mitigation actions over and above

the many which are already in train.

Achieving the best possible outcome for Ireland in the negotiations remains a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit. In this regard, both I and my officials are continuing to work closely with EU partners and the European Commission Task Force, and with the UK, to ensure the commitments made in phase one are delivered in full and that Ireland's interests are advanced in the EU's position for the negotiations on transitional arrangements and the future relationship. In the course of these engagements, as has been the case to date, Ireland will continue to make proposals to seek to deliver on our objectives and priorities for the Brexit negotiations.

In parallel, intensive work on a no-deal or worst-case outcome is also ongoing. Its focus is on the immediate regulatory and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern. This work is therefore providing baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations, including in regard to transition arrangements and the future relationship. It also takes account of the planning being undertaken at EU level by the new Commission Preparedness Unit, which is issuing information notes aimed at different business sectors.

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

Our longer-term economic strategies will also be critically important in addressing the challenges of Brexit, notably Ireland 2040 –the National Development Plan. The Enterprise Strategy 2025 is also under review, and we are in active discussions with the European Investment Bank for a potential increase in investment in the country.

Passport Data

73. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of passport applications being processed; the number of renewals and first-time passports respectively; the average processing time for each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8840/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service provides a range of channels to Irish citizens wishing to apply for a passport, including a postal application system, online service, and through the network of Irish Missions worldwide. The Passport Service has received over 129,000 applications between 1 January and 16 February 2018, which represents an increase of 16% on the same period last year. In order to respond to seasonal demands and anticipated application increases, the Passport Service has received sanction for 210 Temporary Clerical Officers (“TCOs”) to be appointed to the

Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork this year. Training for the first intake of TCOs has already commenced, with a sizeable proportion already in place. All TCOs are expected to be fully trained and in place by the end of March at latest. The Passport Service is currently processing over 59,000 passport applications. These applications are going through the normal checking, processing and security stages.

Of these current applications, approximately 23,000 are for passport renewals while approximately 12,000 are first time applications. Some 24,000 are in the early stages of the application process and as such, the type of application has yet to be identified. The turnaround timeframe for processing these applications will depend in the first instance on the channel through which the application was submitted.

The target turnaround time for applications made via the Online Passport Renewal Service is 10 working days plus postage. The vast majority of online applications are currently being processed within 7 working days, well ahead of the target. At present, the online service only accommodates adult renewals and passport card applications. It is planned to further extend the online application facility to all citizens, including first-time applicants and children, by 2019.

The current average turnaround time for applications submitted through An Post Passport Express has now increased to 17 working days for both first time applications and renewals. It is expected that this turnaround time will return to the target turnaround time of 15 working day in the coming weeks, as more temporary staff are trained and placed.

The average turnaround time for postal applications submitted through the Passport Office in London is currently 4 weeks for renewals with a minimum of 7 weeks for first-time applications. Applicants resident in Great Britain also have the option of submitting Passport Express applications through two selected post offices in Liverpool and Glasgow, with applications submitted through this channel taking an average 17 working days to process.

Applications submitted through the worldwide network of Irish Embassies and Consulates are currently taking a minimum 6 weeks to process from the date the application is registered at the Passport Office. Delivery times will vary depending on the location of the applicant. I would urge applicants wishing to renew their passports who reside overseas, including Great Britain, to avail of the online passport renewal service where possible.

Passport Data

74. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of credit card type passports issued in the past year; the average time for processing an application for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8841/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Card was launched in October 2015 and offers Irish citizens the convenience of travel to 31 countries including the EU/EEA and Switzerland, with a credit card sized travel document. Applications for passport cards are processed exclusively through the Passport Online Service, accessible via my Department's website at www.dfa.ie/passport. The target turnaround time for this channel is ten working days plus postage. The vast majority of passport card applications are being processed ahead of the target date.

Between 1 January 2017 and 18 February 2018, the Passport Service issued 44,482 passport cards. I would encourage all adult citizens who hold a valid passport to consider applying for a passport card.

Passport Applications Fees

75. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if persons over 70 years of age will be allowed to acquire a three year passport at a reduced cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8935/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The cost of the standard ten year (adult) Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At a cost of €80, which breaks down to €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €8.20 per year for a British passport, €8.50 per year for a French passport, €8.90 per year for renewal of an American passport and €18.10 per year for an Australian passport. Given that the production cost of a passport is the same, irrespective of validity, and given that the shortfall in revenue would have to be met by the taxpayer, I do not have any plans to offer a three year passport at a reduced cost for persons over 70 years of age.

Human Rights

76. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the business and human rights implementation group as required under the national plan on business and human rights 2017 to 2020 has been established; the composition of the group; and when it will commence its work. [8961/18]

77. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has commissioned a baseline assessment of the legislative and regulatory framework pertaining to business and human rights here as committed to under the national plan on business and human rights 2017 to 2020; and when it will be completed. [8962/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 77 together.

Ireland published its National Plan on Business and Human Rights in November 2017 on foot of a Government commitment to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). The National Plan aims to give effect to the Guiding Principles through the promotion of responsible business practice at home and overseas, and was developed following an extensive consultation process.

The National Plan is designed to be a living document which will permit updates to reflect contemporaneous developments. One goal of the National Plan is to assist and encourage businesses to understand that respect for human rights is good for business. Part of this process is to encourage businesses to promote human rights within their business operations and engage positively with organisations and individuals seeking to do the same. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has responsibility for the operationalisation of a number of actions set out in the National Plan, including the establishment of a Business and Human Rights Implementation Group. This group will consist of representatives from Government, the business community and civil society. It is envisaged that the group will meet twice a year to review implementation of the National Plan. Work is underway to establish the Group and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is liaising with stakeholders in this regard. A key priority is to identify an individual with a strong track record in the promotion of human rights in a business environment to chair the Group.

Preliminary work has also been undertaken to commission a baseline assessment which will complete a comprehensive study of the legislation and regulatory framework pertaining to busi-

ness and human rights as it applies in Ireland.

Business and Human Rights has been added as a regular item on the agendas of both the Inter-Departmental Committee on Human Rights and the DFAT NGO Standing Committee and will be discussed at upcoming meetings of both bodies.

Tax Code

78. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department will consider documenting travel expenses paid to a separate section of a P60 on request to be used for persons applying for local authority housing loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8901/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that currently, following the end of each year, an employer is statutorily obliged to issue to each employee who was employed by them on 31 December a P60 in respect of that year. The P60 must be issued between 1 January and 15 February and contain details of total taxable pay and deductions made by the employer during the preceding year.

I assume the Deputy is referring to travel expenses which are necessarily incurred by an employee in the performance of the duties of the employment and which are reimbursed by employers without deduction of tax. The reason employers may reimburse such expenses tax free to employees is because section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 allows for a deduction from taxable emoluments in respect of travelling expenses necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of employment. As such expenses are not subject to deduction of tax under the PAYE system, they are not included on the P60.

2018 will be the final year in respect of which an employer will be obliged to issue a P60 to employees and I understand from Revenue that the format for the 2018 P60 has recently been finalised. With significant reform of the PAYE system applying from January 2019 under the PAYE modernisation programme, which will involve a new real-time reporting regime for all employers who make taxable payments to employees, employers will no longer be required to provide employees with a P60. Instead, Revenue will provide employees with relevant pay and tax details. I understand from Revenue that there are no proposals to collect information from employers regarding payments to employees which are not subject to deduction under the PAYE system.

VAT Registration

79. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a company tax registration (TR2) application by a company (details supplied); when the VAT number will be issued to the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8839/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by The Revenue Commissioners that an application to register for Employer PAYE, Corporation Tax and Value Added Tax (VAT) was received from the company in question on 4 January 2018. The confirmation of Employer PAYE and Corporation Tax registration was issued to the company on 7 January 2018.

The application for VAT registration was selected for further checking in line with Revenue's Risk Management Guidelines on VAT registration. This checking has now been completed and

the VAT registration has been confirmed. This confirmation is available in the Revenue Online System (ROS) inbox of the company's tax agent.

Tax Compliance

80. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if a person's (details supplied) H1N1 form that was sent to the Revenue Commissioners in County Sligo for their housing application will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8843/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a HPL1 Form was received in respect of the individual concerned on 5 February 2018. The form was certified and returned to the person on 16 February 2018.

VAT Rate Application

81. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if it is possible to exempt or reduce the VAT rate applicable to the provision of locum general practitioner services by organisations such as Shannondoc; the estimated cost of exempting or reducing the VAT rate to 13.5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8850/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by The Revenue Commissioners that a change in VAT rates applying to a supply of goods or services must be in compliance with the EU VAT Directive (Council Directive 2006/112/EC). The Directive generally provides that supplies of goods and services, other than in limited circumstances, be chargeable to VAT at the standard rate. In this regard the Directive provides:

- that a reduced rate of VAT may apply to supplies of goods and services in the categories set out in Annex III to the Directive, and

- that supplies of certain categories of goods and services as specified in the Directive, must be exempt from VAT.

As the service of providing a locum general practitioner is not among the categories of supplies listed in Annex III of the Directive and is not included in the categories of supplies which are exempt from VAT, there is no scope for either the reduced rate of VAT to be applied to that service or to have that service exempted from VAT.

Tax Credits

82. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of the total provided by way of a reduction in corporation tax payable in respect of research and development tax credit; the amount provided by way of refundable credit in each of the years 2013 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8921/18]

84. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of research and development tax credits availed of in bands (details supplied) in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8934/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 84 together.

I am advised by Revenue that statistics in respect of the Research and Development (R&D) tax credit are available at www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-tax-expenditures.pdf up to 2015. Final information in respect of 2016 returns is not yet available. However, based on initial analysis of the R&D elements of 2016 tax returns, provisional estimates for 2016 are provided but these should be considered as highly tentative at this time. Final figures for 2016 will be published by Revenue in the coming months.

The table shows the amount of R&D tax credit claimed by way of a reduction in the amount of Corporation Tax payable and also the amount of R&D tax credit claimed as a refundable credit.

Year	Research and Development Credit offset against Corporation Tax liability	Research and Development Credit - Repayable Credit
	€m	€m
2013	185	236
2014	227	326
2015	349	359
2016 (provisional)	434	240

The table shows the amount of credit availed of by the enquired tax credit bands.

Range of Research And Development Tax Credit€	2013	2014	2015	2016 (Provisional)
€m	€m	€m	€m	
1 - 50,000	17.1	16.1	15.9	15.4
50,001 - 100,000	18	18.6	17.9	18.2
100,001 - 250,000	36	34.7	36.4	37
250,001 - 500,000	32	34.1	30.9	27.2
500,001 - 1,000,000	30.8	29.1	40.9	34.2
1,000,001 - 5,000,000	97.5	82.1	91.1	102.8
Over 5,000,000	190	338.6	474.8	440
Total	421.4	553.3	707.9	674.4

VAT Rebates

83. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Finance if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed regarding claiming back VAT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8931/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Irish VAT law does not provide for VAT

input deductibility by VAT registered persons in respect of petrol.

VAT registered persons that make supplies are entitled to claim the cost of VAT on the purchase of diesel used in the course of their business, as is the case with most business costs. However, section 60 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 prohibits VAT deductibility by businesses on certain goods and services for anti-avoidance reasons. Expenditure on petrol, as well as expenditure on food, drink, accommodation, and entertainment is specifically excluded from deductibility entitlement, even where the petrol or other goods and services are acquired or used for the purpose of a taxable business.

Under Article 176 of the EU VAT Directive, Ireland can retain certain restrictions on VAT deductibility that were in place before 1979. As VAT input deductibility has been restricted on petrol since 1972, Ireland can retain that block on deductibility. If this restriction is removed or eased, it would not be possible to reintroduce it.

There is a case for petrol and diesel to be treated equally in terms of input deductibility entitlements as there is a greater level of diesel run personal motor vehicles in operation today than in the past. However, the provisions of Article 176 prohibit the application of a new deductibility restriction on diesel expenditure. As the anti-avoidance concerns regarding petrol expenditure deductibility continue, the restriction on VAT deductibility remains valid.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 82.

Financial Services Regulation

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the average wait time for a credit servicing firm to become regulated by the Central Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8955/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following the enactment of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015, the Central Bank developed detailed Authorisation Requirements and Standards for credit servicing firms which set appropriately high requirements on applicant firms underpinned with a rigorous application process.

These include requirements on how these firms deal with their loan owner in order to ensure that borrowers receive the full protections of Irish financial services legislation, including Central Bank codes.

The Central Bank seeks to process each application for authorisation as expeditiously as possible, while meeting its obligation to operate a rigorous and effective gatekeeper function in order to ensure that only firms that demonstrate compliance with the Authorisation Requirements and Standards are authorised. However, the Central Bank does not comment on its specific engagements with any regulated or applicant firm.

I understand that the Central Bank is currently putting applicant firms through this application process, to ensure that only firms that demonstrate compliance with these Standards are authorised by the Central Bank.

A register of those firms who notified the Central Bank that they wished to avail of the transitional provisions provided for in Part V of the Central Bank Act 1997 (the 1997 Act) and those firms that have been authorised to carry on the business of a credit servicing firm is available on the Central Bank website.

Fitness and Probity Regime

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons disqualified, removed from a position within a bank or prevented from taking up a position under the Central Bank's fitness and probity regime in each category in each of the years from 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8975/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that under its Administrative Sanctions Procedure, in place since 2006, 12 individuals have been disqualified from performing senior management roles in regulated firms.

Under the Fitness & Probity regime, in place since 2011, 4 individuals have been prohibited from working in regulated firms. Two of these were employed by credit institutions, albeit credit unions rather than banks.

As part of the Central Bank's Gatekeeper role which again has been in place since 2011, 40 individuals who had applied to take up senior positions within financial services firms withdrew their applications following robust challenge by the Central Bank, which in many cases involved one or more challenge interviews with that individual. These withdrawals span all sectors and 5 have involved individuals withdrawing their applications for senior positions in banks.

The Central Bank have provided the table.

Year	Disqualification as a result of conduct while at a Bank	Prohibition as a result of conduct while at a Bank	Prevented from taking up a position at a Bank
2018	1	0	0
2017	0	0	1
2016	0	0	0
2015	0	0	2
2014	0	0	0
2013	0	0	2
2012	0	0	0
2011	0	0	0
2010	0	0	0
2009	0	0	0
2008	0	0	0

Loan Books Purchasers

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of all known loan portfolio sales by regulated banks here, including the State supported banks since 2016; the project name given to the sale, in tabular form; the number and nature of the loans sold; the name of the purchaser; and the purchase price, if available. [8988/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information which the Deputy is requesting is not held in my Department. The Central Bank have informed me that under the

Section 33AK of the Central Bank Act 1942, the Central Bank is not in a position to provide any specific information in this regard.

However, some of the information sought is publically available from other sources. For example, Deloitte's fifth edition of the Deleveraging Europe series examines the European loans market, providing an up-to-date overview of the latest transactions at H1 2017 which can be found at <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/financial-advisory/articles/deleveraging-europe-market-update.html>. In addition, further information published by KPMG in respect of European debt sales can be found at <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2016/09/european-debt-sales.pdf> and at <https://home.kpmg.com/xx/en/home/insights/2016/02/european-debt-sales-2016-dashboard.html>

Loan Books Purchasers

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if unregulated loan owners are permitted by the Central Bank to have direct contact with the borrower in relation to their loan, for example, to discuss a possible restructuring of the loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8989/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act") was introduced in July 2015 to fill the consumer protection gap where loans are sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. The 2015 Act introduced a new regulatory regime in respect of Credit Servicing Firms, bringing such firms within the Central Bank's regulatory remit.

Under the 2015 Act, if a firm who bought loans from an original lender is unregulated, then the loans must be serviced by a Credit Servicing Firm who is authorised and regulated by the Central Bank.

Credit servicing firms must comply with all relevant requirements of financial services legislation, including the regulatory requirements set out in the Central Bank's statutory Codes of Conduct and Regulations. These requirements include:

- the Consumer Protection Code 2012;
- the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013;
- the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015;
- the Minimum Competency Code 2017 and the Minimum Competency Regulations 2017;
- Part V of the Central Bank Act 1997; and
- Fitness and Probity Regulations and Standards issued under Part 3 of the Central Bank Reform Act 2010.

Credit servicing firms are firms who manage or administer loans on behalf of the unregulated firm. 'Credit servicing' includes all interactions with the consumer in respect of the loan, including:

- Notification of changes in interest rates or payments due;
- Collecting repayments on the loan;

- Managing complaints;
- Assessing the consumer's financial circumstances in cases of financial difficulties; and
- Communications about potential restructuring arrangements.

The 2015 Act ensures that borrowers whose loans are sold to unregulated third parties maintain the regulatory protections they had prior to the sale.

Loan Books Purchasers

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason unregulated loan owners such as private equity funds should not be brought fully within the ambit of the Central Bank regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8990/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government introduced the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 to regulate Credit Servicing Firms. The Central Bank regulates credit servicing firms who act as agents for the loan owners because it is the credit servicing firms that interact with the customers.

The Department's early position was that loan owners should be regulated but the consultation process undertaken at the time made it clear that credit servicing, as the customer-facing activity, was the appropriate activity to regulate and this legislation achieves this.

Credit Servicing Firms must comply with all relevant requirements of financial services legislation, including the regulatory requirements set out in the Central Bank's statutory Codes of Conduct and Regulations.

The legislation ensures that borrowers whose loans are sold on to third parties maintain the same regulatory consumer protections they had prior to the sale. These issues are kept under regular review in my department.

Loan Books Purchasers

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the legal basis for applying the code of conduct on mortgage arrears and the consumer protection code to an unregulated loan owner. [8991/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act") was introduced to fill the consumer protection gap where loans are sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. Under the 2015 Act, if the firm who bought loans from the original lender is an unregulated firm, then the loans must be serviced by a 'credit servicing firm' which is regulated by the Central Bank. Credit Servicing Firms are typically firms that manage or administer credit agreements such as mortgages or other loans on behalf of unregulated entities. The CCMA is a code issued under Section 117 of the Central Bank Act, 1989. The CCMA applies to all regulated mortgage lenders operating in the State when dealing with borrowers facing or in mortgage arrears on their primary residence, including any mortgage lending activities outsourced by these lenders. Lenders are required to comply with all aspects of the CCMA and non-compliance with the CCMA is enforceable against regulated entities by the Central Bank.

The CCMA sets out how mortgage lenders must treat borrowers in or facing mortgage ar-

rears, with due regard to the fact that each case of mortgage arrears is unique and needs to be considered on its own merits. All cases must be handled sympathetically and positively by the lender, with the objective at all times of assisting the borrower to meet his/her mortgage obligations. The CCMA sets out the framework that lenders must use when dealing with borrowers in mortgage arrears or pre-arrears.

In relation to repossessions, Provision 56 of the CCMA provides that a regulated entity may only commence legal proceedings for repossession of a borrower's primary residence where the regulated entity has made every reasonable effort under the CCMA to agree an alternative repayment arrangement with the borrower or his/her nominated representative, and the specific timeframes set out in the CCMA have been adhered to or the borrower has been classified as not co-operating and notified in accordance with the CCMA.

Loan Books Purchasers

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a repossession action will be taken in the name of the unregulated loan owner or the appointed credit servicing firm in relation to a PDH mortgage acquired by an unregulated loan owner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8992/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Most loan agreements include a clause that allows the original lender to sell the loan on to another firm. The Central Bank has no jurisdiction over unregulated third parties and therefore has no power to investigate the activities of such entities.

However, under the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act"), if a firm who bought loans from an original lender is unregulated, then the loans must be serviced by a Credit Servicing Firm who is authorised and regulated by the Central Bank.

Credit servicing firms are firms who manage or administer loans on behalf of the unregulated firm. 'Credit servicing' includes all interactions with the consumer in respect of the loan, including:

- Notification of changes in interest rates or payments due;
- Collecting repayments on the loan;
- Managing complaints; and
- Assessing the consumer's financial circumstances in cases of financial difficulties.

Under the 2015 Act, 'credit servicing' does not include taking such steps as may be necessary for the enforcement of a credit agreement.

Loan Books Purchasers

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if in a situation in which an unregulated loan owner appoints a credit servicing firm in respect of a mortgage portfolio, it is the unregulated loan owner or the credit servicing firm that makes the final decision as to whether a restructuring agreement is entered into; if enforcement action is taken; if there is a

change in the interest rate of a variable rate product; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8993/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, most loan agreements include a clause that allows the original lender to sell the loan on to another firm. Under the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”), if a firm who bought loans from an original lender is unregulated, then the loans must be serviced by a Credit Servicing Firm who is authorised and regulated by the Central Bank.

Credit servicing firms are firms who manage or administer loans on behalf of the unregulated firm. ‘Credit servicing’ includes all interactions with the consumer in respect of the loan, including:

- Notification of changes in interest rates or payments due;
- Collecting repayments on the loan;
- Managing complaints; and
- Assessing the consumer’s financial circumstances in cases of financial difficulties.

Under the 2015 Act, ‘credit servicing’ does not include:

- the determination of the overall strategy for the management and administration of a portfolio of credit agreements;
- the maintenance of control over key decisions relating to such portfolio; or
- taking such steps as may be necessary for the purposes of—
 - (i) enabling the undertaking of credit servicing by another person, or
 - (ii) enforcing a credit agreement.

Civil Service Renewal Plan

93. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No.147 of 31 January 2018, the number of public servants based in each zone by each specific Department, agency or body listed in a document (details supplied) by location, in tabular form;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8837/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the Civil Service Mobility scheme is one of a number of arrangements to be put in place to fulfil the requirements of Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan which calls to ‘Expand career and mobility opportunities for staff across geographic, organisational and sectorial boundaries’.

The scheme is being phased in with Phase 1A for the grades of CO and EO moving to/from and outside Dublin.

The Civil Service Mobility scheme is only available for Civil Servants.

My Department does not hold information on Public Service numbers per organisation and location.

National Monuments

94. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the execution site of four persons in December 1922 in Roscrea Castle is at present being used for storage by the OPW and that the relatives and various local organisations are requesting that the site be opened on a permanent basis and prepared for the 100 year anniversary; his plans to allow the site to be used in events leading up to and during the anniversary in 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8855/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The location referred to at Roscrea Castle is currently being used as by the OPW as a utility area serving the entire Roscrea National Monument site. However, mindful of the historic connotations involved, discussions have been held recently with the Roscrea Heritage Society, who are ultimately the owners of the property, about how to mark the upcoming anniversary appropriately and what form public access to the area should take. OPW will also be guided in relation to these matters by the All Party Oireachtas Committee on Commemorations who are considering these issues on a national basis.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

95. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the directive on the compulsory retirement age of 65 years of age for public servants is coming into force; the timeframe for its introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8890/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 53517/2017 on 14 December 2017.

The legislation is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the Spring/Summer Session 2018.

Special Educational Needs Staff

96. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the options available for a person (details supplied) to get onto the SNA panel to be considered for a permanent position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8832/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed. These supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs continue to operate under the Lansdowne Road Agreement, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to that agreement. As set out in the LRC proposals, the supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school / ETB.

Once an SNA with a minimum of one year's service (service in a substitute capacity i.e. covering for maternity leave, sick leave, career breaks, job-sharing etc. does not count) is notified by his/her employer that s/he is to be made redundant then s/he shall be deemed to be

a member of a supplementary assignment panel for SNAs. The detailed supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs for the 2017/2018 school year are set out in Departmental Circular 0042/2017 which issued on 25 May 2017 and which is available on the Department's website at the following address:

http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0042_2017.pdf.

The operation of this panel is described and outlined in Circular 0042/2017 and it is designed to be as flexible as possible which enables all eligible SNAs, who have the requisite Panel Form 1 completed by their former employer, to apply for any SNA position that is advertised by a school or an ETB with no sectoral, diocesan or geographical limitations imposed. Every eligible SNA will remain on the panel for two years with a view to getting further employment. If they are not successful over that period of time in obtaining a further SNA position then they will be eligible for a redundancy payment. Furthermore, an SNA may opt out of this supplementary assignment panel at any point in time triggering the processing of his/her redundancy payment in line with the terms set out in the SNA redundancy scheme (DES Circular 58/2006) or any revision of same that is applicable at that time.

It should be noted that this does not prevent any person, including newly qualified SNAs, from applying for SNA vacancies but employers are obliged to give precedence to applicants who are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

The Supplementary Assignment Panel arrangements are reviewed by my Department on an annual basis in conjunction with an independent Supplementary Assignment Manager, the school management bodies and the two unions representing SNA staff (IMPACT and SIPTU).

My Department has set up a dedicated e-mail address to deal with all queries in relation to the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel and any queries in respect of the operation of the Panel can be directed to this dedicated e-mail address: snasupplementpanel@education.gov.ie.

Irish Research Council

97. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the sum of moneys allocated by the Irish Research Council in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018 under the enterprise partnership schemes or employment led schemes; the amount recouped from employers in each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8856/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information requested by the Deputy for the years 2012 to 2017 is outlined in the table. The information for 2018 is not readily available at this stage.

Irish Research Council funding of enterprise programmes and co-funding collected from enterprise partners, 2012-2017.

	2012 Amounts Allocated	2012 Amount Collected	2013 Amounts Allocated	2013 Amount Collected	2014 Amounts Allocated	2014 Amount Collected
EPS Schemes *	€3,201,600	€1,198,257	€ 3,672,000	€ 1,322,437	€ 4,100,947	€ 1,491,855
EBP **	€ 720,000	N/A	€ 1,044,000	N/A	€ 1,504,000	N/A
TOTAL	€3,921,600	€1,198,257	€ 4,716,000	€ 1,322,437	€ 5,604,947	€ 1,491,855

table contd.

Questions - Written Answers

	2015 Amounts Allocated	2015 Amount Collected	2016 Amounts Allocated	2016 Amount Collected	2017 Amounts Allocated	2017 Amount Collected
EPS Schemes *	€ 3,674,918	€ 1,155,089	€ 3,882,483	€ 1,882,660	€ 4,194,639	€ 1,402,288
EBP **	€ 2,424,653	N/A	€ 2,559,692	N/A	€ 2,346,975	N/A
TOTAL	€ 6,099,571	€ 1,155,089	€ 6,442,175	€ 1,882,660	€ 6,541,614	€ 1,402,288

The Amount Collected columns refer to co-funding collected from enterprise partners.

*Enterprise Partnership Scheme. The Irish Research Council invoices companies for one third of the value of the award on an annual basis.

**Employment-based postgraduate programme. No money is claimed by the Irish Research Council as part of the Employment Based Programme. Employers make the salary contribution directly to the awardee.

Irish Research Council

98. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by the Irish Research Council on public relations firms, publicity, sponsorship, promotional or advertising material in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the proportion this represents of its overall budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8857/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy for the years 2012 to 2017 is outlined in the attached document. The information for 2018 is not readily available at this stage.

It is important that the IRC is in a position to communicate regarding the programmes which it operates, and to promote new programmes to prospective applicants, both at home and abroad.

Irish Research Council Expenditure on Promotion 2012-2017.

	2012	Percentage of admin budget	2013	Percentage of admin budget	2014
Public Rela- tions Firms					
Publicity	€ 290	0.00%			€ 95,447
Sponsorship	€ 19,468	0.06%	€ 40,789	0.13%	€ 60,909
Promotional/ Advertising	€ 4,177	0.01%	€ 11,165	0.04%	€ 14,026
TOTAL	€ 23,935	0.08%	€ 51,954	0.17%	€ 170,382
Total Council Budget	€30,643,000		€31,391,000		€31,400,000

tabled contd.

	Percentage of admin budget	2015	Percentage of admin budget	2016	Percentage of admin budget	2017	Percentage of admin budget
Public Relations Firms		€ 20,177	0.06%	€ 63,045	0.2%	€ 61,619	0.18%
Publicity	0.30%	€ 13,952	0.04%			€ 39,162	0.11%
Sponsorship	0.19%	€ 134,135	0.43%	€ 129,628	0.4%	€ 100,992	0.30%
Promotional/ Advertising	0.04%	€ 46,270	0.15%	€ 83,441	0.3%	€ 42,180	0.12%
TOTAL	0.54%	€ 214,534	0.68%	€ 276,114	0.9%	€ 243,953	0.71%
Total Council Budget		€31,400,000		€31,250,000		€34,150,000	

School Admissions

99. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons in Dublin 15 are finding it difficult to find a school place in their local educate together national school, which has a waiting list, and are also having difficulties securing a place in the local national school under Catholic patronage in view of the fact their children are not baptised; his plans to do to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8861/18]

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.

As the Deputy will be aware the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 was published in July 2016. The Bill which passed Committee Stage on 28th June 2017 and will shortly proceed to Report Stage, is an important piece of legislation which strives to create a new more parent-friendly, equitable and consistent approach to how school admissions policy operates for the almost 4,000 primary and post-primary schools in this country.

The main provisions of the Bill include measures to:

- Ensure that where a school is not oversubscribed (which relates to 80% of schools) it must admit all students applying;
- Ban waiting lists, thus ending the discrimination against parents who move in to a new area;

- Require all schools to publish their admissions policies, which will include details of the provisions for pupils who decline to participate in religious instruction;

- Require all schools to consult with and inform parents where changes are being made to admissions policies;

- Provide for a situation where a child (with special needs or otherwise) cannot find a school place, and allow the National Council for Special Education or Tusla (Child and Family Agency) to designate a school place for the child.

Last June during Committee Stage debate on the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill I advised that my preference is to make changes to the Equal Status Act, 2000 that would remove the capacity for state-funded denominational primary schools, where they are oversubscribed, to use religion as a criteria in admissions process. In my proposal I also made it clear that I was anxious to deal with the position of minority religions.

My officials are currently engaging with the Office of the Attorney General on the development of legislative proposals on this matter and this work is nearing conclusion. It is my intention to progress the Bill to Report Stage once these proposals have been finalised.

School Transport Eligibility

100. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve the criteria for school transport eligibility commencing for the 2018-2019 school year in view of the difficulties that persons have faced in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8897/18]

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

Currently over 116,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

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

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school. It is important to note that all eligible children are accommodated under the terms of the scheme.

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

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

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

they are not eligible for school transport and understand the implications of this choice at the time of application.

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

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

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

Schools Property

101. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will seek a long-term lease for 100 years on the building leased for a school (details supplied); if the purchase of the property is being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8903/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school concerned is located in a former primary school building that was secured as part of Government policy on school divesting.

The property is subject to a 10 year lease between the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) and the Minister for Education and Skills and my Department will continue to work with the school and its patron body in relation to the current and future accommodation needs of the school.

School Accommodation

102. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to engage a design team to design, procure and construct the new accommodation required by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8904/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was recently given approval to install temporary accommodation to facilitate the school's expansion. A letter devolving authority for the installation of this accommodation to the Board of Management has issued to the school.

The letter indicated that where a Board of Management finds it necessary to engage the services of a consultant, the Department is prepared to reimburse the cost of the fees incurred at the rate of 100% where the fees are considered by the Department to be fair and reasonable.

Emergency Works Scheme Funding

103. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be made available to a school (details supplied) to resolve problems with the existing

school, heating, toilets, windows, school yard and the external appearance of the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8905/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In January 2017 the school applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme for window, toilet and heating works. However, this application was unsuccessful as the Emergency Works Scheme is strictly to deal with sudden and unforeseen emergencies in schools. The works sought were upgrade works and these are appropriate to any future Summer Works Schemes

My Department has allocated funding to the school to carry out Fire Safety Works. The project to carry out these works has been devolved for delivery to the school authority.

The school also recently brought to my Department's attention details of an incident which occurred at an entrance point to the school where part of a wall on the school boundary was demolished. The school was advised to make contact with the building owners to ascertain whether or not their insurance would cover the restoration of the wall.

Schools Building Projects Status

104. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of building works at a school (details supplied); when the works will go to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8941/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

In the context of progressing the project, a school site visit, by my Department's technical staff, has been undertaken. The next step involves the formulation of the project brief including the schedules of accommodation and this process is in train. My Department will be liaising with the school's patron in the matter shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

105. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of building works at a school (details supplied); when the works will go to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8942/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

Arising from the national demographic exercise involving all planning areas, including the area where the school is located, at primary and post-primary level, my Department is reviewing the long term pupil enrolment for the school in question. My Department expects to be in contact with the school's patron in the matter shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

106. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

building works at a school (details supplied); when the works will go to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8943/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that my Department has approved 8 general mainstream classrooms as a first phase of the project. This project will be devolved to Cork Education and Training Board for delivery.

Education Policy

107. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason he has instructed his Department's officials to advise some educate together schools to reduce intake to half a stream in the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8950/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the 2012 Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector recommended that demand for patronage diversity should be met in areas of stable population by divesting patronage of existing schools where there is evidence of parental demand for change.

In this context, in 2012/13, my Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 43 areas of stable population to establish the level of demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools. These areas were all stable in terms of population growth, so no new school places were required. However sufficient demand for more choice emerged in 28 areas, including in Tramore, New Ross, Trim, Tuam and Castlebar.

In the majority of the 28 areas surveyed where sufficient demand emerged, the level of parental demand for a wider choice indicated a size of a four classroom school being required to accommodate such a level of demand.

Under the patronage divesting process, a school could be opened where a school building became, or was due to become available as a result of an amalgamation/closure of an existing school. In some areas, in responding to demand for diversity where existing patrons were unable make school properties available, the Department also included an examination of properties held in public ownership.

In order to facilitate the opening of these schools, their initial establishment, as with most new schools, has been in temporary start-up accommodation, pending a permanent school building being made available. All schools, irrespective of their location, have to operate within their available accommodation and manage annual pupil intake accordingly.

The initial establishment of these schools as four-classroom schools and the need to be cognisant of managing the available accommodation has been reflected in my Department's engagement with the patron body of the schools, Educate Together. Indeed, a case has been submitted by Educate Together to my Department to further expand Tramore ETNS, New Ross ETNS, Trim ETNS, Tuam ETNS and Castlebar ETNS and this is currently under consideration.

My Department is currently carrying out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to identify areas of demographic growth and determine where additional school accommodation is needed in order to plan for school provision nationwide and this work

is almost complete. In this context, the outcome of the nationwide demographic exercises will input into consideration of the case submitted by Educate Together.

I have announced a new Patronage Reconfiguration process, which will accelerate the delivery of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools, to reach 400 live schools by 2030. Unlike the previous process, this plan will focus on live transfers, so that a school which transfers under this process would not be reliant on temporary accommodation

Work Permits Data

108. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of permits issued in 2017 under the atypical scheme for non-EU migrant fishers; the numbers issued directly to the fishers; and the numbers issued to employers or boat owners. [8936/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Atypical Working Scheme (AWS) for Seafarers provides a lawful pathway for persons to work lawfully in the Irish fishing fleet on boats of 15 metres and over in length. In 2017, 136 permits were issued under the scheme. This figure consists of 29 permissions granted on the basis of new applications and 107 in relation to renewal of the AWS immigration permission.

All applications to the AWS are made by the employer or their agent and consequently Permit letters are issued to the Agent or Employer of non EEA migrant seafarers. However it is clearly stated on the permit letter that the original must be retained by the non-EEA seafarers themselves.

Probate Applications

109. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average waiting times for probate cases to be processed and concluded; if his attention has been drawn to the distress caused due to the lengthy delays for families involved in such cases; the efforts underway to address these delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8834/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that waiting times in the Probate Office for a Grant of Probate are currently 16 weeks for applications made by solicitors on behalf of clients and approximately 40 weeks for personal applications.

As the Deputy is aware, all applications are assessed on the basis of the date on which they are lodged, an approach which provides fairness and equity to all applicants. Priority is given to probate applications where there is a particular urgency or in extenuating circumstances. In such cases, it is open to applicants to bring the matter to the attention of the Probate Office.

As the Deputy will appreciate all applications for Grants in deceased persons' estates are made on foot of a number of mandatory legal documents which must be furnished by the applicants. These require detailed checking by the Probate Office to ensure that the estate of the deceased person is administered correctly and in accordance with the law. Where a person opts to apply for a Grant personally, without the assistance of a solicitor, the process requires signifi-

cant extra support from the Probate Office.

The Courts Service has advised that it is aware of the lengthy waiting times for probate applications, particularly personal applications, to the Probate Office and is working to improve the situation. Additional resources have been provided to the Probate Office to address the current delays. The Courts Service has also advised that it is currently finalising a full review of the probate system and it is anticipated that a report with recommendations for the modernisation of the process will now be presented by early this year.

Garda Communications

110. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenditure on the design, development and launch of the new An Garda Síochána website, garda.ie; if the project was managed internally or externally; and if managed externally, the external contractor or contractors involved in the project. [8838/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda resources, including the procurement of ICT products and services is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter.

I am, however, informed by the Garda authorities that the development of the new Garda website was managed by the Garda Office of Corporate Communications supported by Garda ICT. I understand that An Garda Síochána's previous website was introduced in 2008 and, as well as being out-dated, it was difficult for the public to access the information they needed easily. An updated website with better information for the public on areas such as crime prevention was a recommendation of the Garda Inspectorate 2014 report.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the contractor for the design and development of the site was PTools which was appointed following a public tender process. Total payments to PTools Software as at 20 February 2018 amounted to €53,075.

There were some costs incurred in relation to Irish translation and content development costs – to date they amount to €19,647.01 (incl VAT). Translation of the entire website into Irish is ongoing.

The Garda authorities inform me that An Garda Síochána's new website has a strong focus on providing information in an easily accessible way based on the needs of the public. Further, based on the Garda Public Attitude Survey, the website also contains FAQs, supplied by policing experts working in these areas, on crimes that the public are most concerned about such as domestic abuse, sexual crime, human trafficking, assaults and burglary.

Legal Aid Service Data

111. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the waiting times for an appointment for free legal aid, by county. [8852/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am interpreting the Deputy's question as referring to civil legal aid. The provision of civil legal aid in the State is delivered by the Legal Aid Board pursuant to the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2017.

I am conscious that there are significant demands on the Board and that this gives rise to waiting times for certain services at most of the Board's law centres. However, waiting times have been markedly reduced over the past couple of years due to measures introduced by the Board and the Deputy will be glad to know that the Board's budget was increased to €40.275m in 2018.

The Board is extremely conscious that delays in service can lead to difficulties not just for the client but also for children, the wider family and the community, as well as the courts system. In this regard, the Board provides a priority service in respect of a number of areas such as domestic violence, child abduction, child care, and asylum and related matters. All other applications are placed on the waiting list.

An application for civil legal aid and advice can be made at any Legal Aid Board law centre, regardless of the county of residence of the applicant. For that reason, statistics in relation to waiting times are maintained by law centre rather than county.

I would advise the Deputy that the details of waiting times in each law centre are published on a monthly basis on the Legal Aid Board website. However, to be of assistance, I have included these figures in my response.

Legal Aid Board waiting times – 31 December 2017

		Waiting for 1st consultation		Waiting for 2nd Consultation
Law Centre	Max Waiting Time (wks)	Number	Max Waiting Time (wks)	Number
Athlone	8	21	17	33
Blanchardstown	8	29	0	0
Castlebar	10	40	0	0
Cavan	9	20	0	0
Clondalkin	25	57	0	0
Cork Popes Quay	20	69	0	0
Cork South Mall	23	82	18	68
Dundalk	16	41	0	0
Ennis	17	49	20	28
Finglas	16	57	0	0
Galway Francis St	22	64	0	0
Galway Seville House	8	17	7	15
Jervis Street	5	20	26	69
Kilkenny	13	35	0	0
Letterkenny	12	51	0	0
Limerick	16	61	0	0
Longford	20	44	15	23
Monaghan	22	52	0	0
Navan	24	81	4	7
Nenagh	18	52	0	0
Newbridge	17	33	0	0

		Waiting for 1st consultation		Waiting for 2nd Consultation
Portlaoise	19	79	0	0
Sligo	9	20	0	0
Smithfield	14	93	0	0
Tallaght	21	56	9	3
Tralee	34	128	0	0
Tullamore	5	10	0	0
Waterford	10	38	0	0
Wexford	26	74	0	0
Wicklow	12	45	0	0

I am informed that some law centres operate a 'triage' approach, which involves giving an applicant a short consultation (45 minutes) for legal advice. Those persons remain on the Board's waiting list if they require further legal services and the wait time for this is indicated by the second column (waiting for 2nd consultation).

Legal Aid Service Data

112. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of free legal aid solicitors operating, by county. [8853/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am interpreting the Deputy's question as referring to Civil Legal Aid. The provision of civil legal aid in the State is delivered through the Legal Aid Board pursuant to the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 - 2017.

In addition to solicitors directly employed by the Board, it also engages private solicitors, under the Private Practitioner District Court Scheme, to assist in dealing with demand and has a separate panel to support service provision under the Abhaile scheme. Abhaile is the Government's free mortgage arrears support service. It is co-ordinated by my Department and the Department of Social Protection and is implemented by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service working in close co-operation with the Legal Aid Board, the Insolvency Service of Ireland and the Citizens Information Board.

The table indicates the number of solicitors currently operating by county through the Board's network of law centres.

Counties	LAB Solicitors	Private Practitioner (PP) Solicitors	Abhaile
Carlow		78	2
Cavan	2	55	1
Clare	3	88	1
Cork	14	178	10
Donegal	4	80	4
Dublin	44	338	21
Galway	12	123	5
Kerry	5	92	1

Counties	LAB Solicitors	Private Practitioner (PP) Solicitors	Abhaile
Kildare	4	151	2
Kilkenny	4	28	2
Laois	3	80	
Leitrim		66	
Limerick	4	98	3
Longford	2	76	1
Louth	2	107	4
Mayo	3	69	
Meath	2	143	
Monaghan	3	51	1
Offaly	3	82	
Roscommon		106	1
Sligo	2	65	2
Tipperary	4	80	4
Waterford	3	59	
Westmeath	4	112	2
Wexford	3	85	2
Wicklow	4	126	
Counties	LAB Solicitors	Private Practitioner (PP) Solicitors	Abhaile
Total	134	903*	69*

*The actual number of solicitors practising is less than this figure as some solicitors may be registered on more than one county panel.

Courts Service Data

113. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of court dates rescheduled in each of the years the years 2015 to 2017 due to not having representation from free legal aid. [8854/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, the Courts Service is responsible for the management and administration of the Courts. The Court Service is not involved in the administration of justice which is a matter for the courts and the judiciary, who are subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions. The conduct of and decisions made in any court case is a matter entirely for the presiding judge and it is not open to the Courts Service to comment or intervene in any way in such matters.

However in order to be of assistance to the Deputy enquiries have been made and the Courts Service has informed me that statistics are not compiled in such a way as to provide the information requested by the Deputy.

Visa Applications

114. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details

supplied) who has previously applied for entry here will be granted a visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8862/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is open to any visa required national to apply for a visa for any purpose. Each visa application is considered on its individual merits.

In assessing any application, the Visa Officer will have regard to all of the information available to them including any previous applications made. Where a previous application has been refused, then the applicant should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to them and be in a position to address these in a new application.

The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that any visa sought should be granted. Guidelines on the application process including details of the required supporting documentation can be found on the INIS website *www.inis.gov.ie*.

I am further advised by INIS that there is no current application for a visa from the person to whom the question refers.

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.

In addition, members of the public may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (*visa-mail@justice.ie*).

General Data Protection Regulation Implementation

115. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the preparedness of An Garda Síochána in the context of the incoming General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) EU 2016/679; if civilian staff and Garda officers have undertaken or been offered specific training and-or briefing in relation to GDPR; the number of data protection officers (DPOs) that will be appointed within An Garda Síochána; if there will be a monetary allowance attached to the newly assigned role of DPO; if An Garda Síochána has undertaken a survey and or review of all its databases; if risks were identified; if so, the nature of the risks identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8873/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) EU 2016/679 will come into force on 25 May 2018. The transposition date for the new EU Data Protection Directive, which relates specifically to law enforcement, is also May 2018.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the overall business and administration of An Garda Síochána, including the arranging of training for Garda members and civilian staff, and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter.

To facilitate compliance by An Garda Síochána with the requirements of the GDPR, sanction has been given, following the approval of the post by the Policing Authority, for the organisation to appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO), which is a mandatory requirement of

the GDPR. There is no specific monetary allowance attached to the position, which will be at Principal Officer level and will be remunerated according to the standard civil service pay scale for that level. The DPO will have responsibility for a number of tasks, including ensuring compliance with the GDPR and providing appropriate advice to the organisation. I am informed that the selection process is at an advanced stage.

An Garda Síochána is also establishing a dedicated Data Protection Section to support the DPO in advance of the GDPR implementation date.

I am further informed that, in preparation for the commencement of the GDPR, An Garda Síochána has commenced a review of all Garda databases with a view to ensuring compliance.

In addition, I understand from the Garda authorities that there will be an awareness campaign throughout An Garda Síochána to inform all Garda personnel of their rights and obligations under the GDPR.

Advanced GDPR training will also be provided to those members of staff who will be required to perform more specific tasks with regard to data protection policy and procedures. The training provider is currently being sourced through an Office of Government Procurement tendering process and this training is expected to commence shortly.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which Garda vetting has been completed in respect of candidates that sat entrance exams since recruitment to An Garda Síochána recommenced; the degree to which approval forthcoming is pending or refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8891/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the recruitment process for An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial stages of the process with the final stages, involving a physical competency test, a medical examination and vetting of candidates, being managed by the Commissioner. As Minister, I have no direct involvement in the matter.

I have requested a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the information sought and I will write directly to the Deputy when the report is to hand.

Citizenship Applications

117. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a matter will be addressed regarding a citizenship application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8949/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A previous application was deemed ineligible for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 24 October 2016 advising of the decision.

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.

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.

Family Reunification Policy

118. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of his plans to introduce a family reunification humanitarian admission programme as announced in November 2017. [8951/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 14 November last, together with my colleague, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David Stanton T.D., I announced a new scheme of family reunification in support of refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and their families.

I would like to emphasise that this new scheme is aimed at assisting family members of all refugees from established conflict zones and not just refugees from Syria. This new Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme (FRHAP) will form part of the Government's commitments under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). The Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme (FRHAP) will see, over a two year period, up to 530 immediate family members of refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from established conflict zones come to Ireland as part of our overall commitment to accept 4,000 persons under the IRPP.

This humanitarian admission programme is an initiative of the Government for the benefit of the families of those in receipt of international protection in Ireland and is not part of any EU programme. The FRHAP will be operated under Ministerial discretionary powers and it will be in addition to the family reunification provisions provided for in the International Protection Act 2015. Officials in my Department are in consultation with the UNHCR and other stake-

holders on developing the full operational details of the programme.

I will also continue to apply my discretion in the area of family reunification for those outside of the International Protection process in the ways described in the Non-EEA Policy Document on Family Reunification and operated by INIS.

The design phase of the FRHAP programme is at an advanced stage and additional details on the operation of the programme will be announced on the websites of the Department of Justice and Equality (www.justice.ie) and the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (www.inis.gov.ie) in the coming period. I will update the Deputy in due course.

Departmental Reports

119. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on the Copenhagen economic report; and the role her Department officials will have in responding to same. [8467/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, this study commissioned by my Department and undertaken by Copenhagen Economics was published on Tuesday 14th February. It is also the subject of a stakeholder conference today in Croke Park.

The report examines the Strategic Implications Arising for Ireland from Changing EU-UK Trading Relations and provides an evidence base on key trade and investment questions which will help to inform Ireland's position as part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU.

It will also help to inform our evolving domestic policy response and measures necessary to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities arising as a result of Brexit. Using a computable general equilibrium model to quantify new barriers to trade in goods and services which might emerge as a result of Brexit, the study:

- Quantifies impact of six possible Brexit scenarios on trade and investment – the impact of these scenarios on metrics such as GDP and exports is considered, and analysis of both short and long term impacts is examined; and
- Provides analysis of the likely impact of Brexit on key sectors.

All of the scenarios examined produce a result that is less favourable than a non-Brexit scenario. However, regardless of the scenario, the Irish economy is still expected to record strong, positive growth out to 2030 - Brexit has a dampening impact, resulting in a lower growth rate than would otherwise have occurred.

Given the scale of the Brexit challenge, detailed cross-Government work is continuing at home to prepare for the UK's exit, in parallel to work in Brussels. This includes contingency planning for all possible scenarios.

My own Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) continues to work with colleagues across government through the various structures including the Cabinet committee on all aspects of Brexit, to ensure the growth and resilience of Irish enterprise.

My Department plays a key role in implementing the Government's policies to stimulate the productive capacity of the economy and create an environment which supports job-creation and jobs maintenance. Brexit impacts upon all of these areas, and on many others within the

Department's remit.

In relation to Brexit, our objective is to support firms to adapt to the challenges and opportunities Brexit presents by ensuring we have fit for purpose policies. Our strategy is to minimise risks and maximise opportunities by ensuring the growth and resilience of Irish enterprise post-Brexit working across four pillars which are:

- Helping Firms to Compete;
- Enabling Firms to Innovate
- Supporting Firms to Trade;
- Negotiating for the Best Possible Outcome;

My Department recently published "Building Stronger Business" which summarises the issues facing enterprise, the policy measures my Department has already taken, those we plan to take, our research programme designed to inform these policies, and the Departmental structural reforms put in place to ensure that we can work as efficiently and effectively as possible to support our companies.

Several important steps have already been taken to prepare our economy, including through a range of measures announced in Budgets 2017 and 2018, the commitments included in APJ 2017, and the targets included in the Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy.

From my Department's perspective, we are leveraging the expertise and enhancing the capacity of our Agencies to ensure that they are in the best possible position to address the needs of their clients in relation to competitiveness, innovation and trade diversification. This is being achieved through the provision of information, advice, training and other supports.

Specific DBEI actions to date include:

- DBEI has made an additional €6 million in funding to its agencies, in 2017 and 2018, to recruit up to 100 additional staff, specifically to assist in the response to the evolving Brexit situation. These resources have been distributed across Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority. These additional resources will be assigned to both overseas offices in markets that are growing and in Irish offices to address a range of Brexit issues, including the support for internationalisation activities, a strengthening of the LEOs ability to respond locally to help micro-enterprises, and enhanced support for innovation.

- The rollout of the Brexit Loan Scheme to provide affordable financing to Irish firms impacted by Brexit. The scheme aims to make up to €300 million available to business with less than 500 employees.

- We are developing proposals for a Longer-Term Business Investment Loan Scheme together with a new Business Advisory Hub service which would focus on business development to allow enterprises to position themselves for a post-Brexit environment.

- The EU Commission has approved a 'rescue and restructuring' scheme. The scheme can be drawn on in exceptional circumstance for a company severely affected by Brexit.

- We are working with DG Competition examining other possible measures to support some of our most exposed and impacted companies should the need arise. Such measures may need a greater level of support than is required under current State aid rules.

Looking forward, Action Plan for Jobs 2018 will continue to act as an effective lever for driving reforms that enhance the competitiveness of Irish firms, increase jobs and grow the resilience of our economy in the context of Brexit, while we are also finalising a review of Enterprise 2025 to take account of Brexit and other global challenges over the longer term.

Our response to Brexit will continue to evolve and the Copenhagen Economics study, along with evidence emerging from other relevant studies, as well as continued engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, will assist in informing the evolution of that response.

Brexit Supports

120. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingencies and supports in place to safeguard Irish small and medium enterprises and export businesses from a hard Brexit scenario, including revision of State aid rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8894/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is carrying out extensive work to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. Informed by detailed research, my Department is putting in place a package of measures that will allow us to respond to the needs of businesses including the Brexit Loan Scheme which was announced in Budget 2018, and will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future.

The recent signing of the counter guarantee from the EIB group (through its InnovFin Guarantee) means that the €24 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) can be leveraged to provide a fund of €300 million. The Brexit Loan Scheme will be open to businesses of fewer than 500 employees which can demonstrate that they are significantly exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of Brexit. They must be a viable business, doing business in Ireland, and they must have a business development strategy demonstrating that they plan to innovate or adapt in response to Brexit. My officials are also examining policy proposals for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme to support businesses to invest strategically for a post-Brexit environment together with a new Business Finance Advisory Hub service which would focus on business development.

In November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager (who has responsibility for EU State aid policy). An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from DG Competition, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. The Working Group has met three times and in between these meetings, there has been engagement on specific issues in order to continue to progress matters. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

As one part of a suite of measures to mitigate against the effects of Brexit, a Rescue and Restructuring (R&R) Scheme notified to the Commission was approved in late November 2017. This scheme has been put in place as it is considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary.

Brexit Supports

121. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have taken up Brexit business supports, such as the be prepared grants and Brexit readiness vouchers provided by Enterprise Ireland and InterTradeIreland. [8895/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The long-term response to Brexit is for companies to become more competitive, more innovative and to diversify their export footprint into more markets. I am confident that the agencies under my Department have the supports to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK and also to become more resilient by broadening their sales to other international markets. Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the LEOs are actively supporting their clients to achieve this. My Department provided for additional monies in 2017 to enable EI and the LEOs to ramp up its supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

- productivity,
- innovation,
- management capability and
- leadership skills,

and really driving the ambition of managers to look to other markets around the world.

Enterprise Ireland's Be Prepared Grant offers SMEs a grant of up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an action plan for economic shocks, such as Brexit. The grant can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and travel expenses associated with researching the direction of their action plan. Enterprise Ireland is committed to processing all applications for the grant within eighteen days. As of February 15th 2018, 84 have been approved, with 8 more in progress. Enterprise Ireland is actively promoting its supports, and is launching a series of Brexit Advisory Clinics this week. These clinics are designed to help companies plan and take immediate action to effectively mitigate the risks and avail of the opportunities that Brexit poses.

A key part of InterTrade Ireland's Brexit strategy is the provision for a Brexit 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme of €2,000, which enables SMEs to purchase specialist advice in areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues. As of February 16th, a total of 43 such vouchers have been approved, with a further 11 pending.

Brexit Supports

122. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of Brexit-related supports for enterprise and farming, including relaxation of State aid rules, European and Irish grant funding and in market supports in the EU26 for businesses seeking to increase trade. [8896/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, principally through Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs, has continued to promote the importance of businesses preparing for Brexit, and has developed a range of supports to help them achieve this.

(EI) and the (LEOs) are the primary providers of supports to assist enterprises within the indigenous sector that are facing challenges arising from Brexit. They are working vigorously to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK and also to become more re-

silient by broadening their sales to other international markets. My Department provided for additional capital funding in 2017 to enable EI and the LEOs to ramp up its supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

- productivity,
- innovation,
- management capability and
- leadership skills.

Specific programmes introduced during 2017 have included;

- An online 'Brexit SME Scorecard' to help all Irish businesses self-assess their exposure to Brexit.
- A 'Prepare for Brexit' online portal and communications campaign.
- An enhanced programme of trade and investment missions and other trade promotional events.
- A new Eurozone Strategy to increase exports to Eurozone countries by 50% by 2020. This
- A new €5k "Be Prepared Grant"(for Enterprise Ireland clients)
- Enterprise Ireland is hosting "Prepare for Brexit" breakfast roadshows nationally to engage with companies.
- Three new strategic communications campaigns launched to target separate elements of Brexit preparedness. 'Global Ambition' is aimed at encouraging companies to export; 'PrepareforBrexit' highlights actions required by companies to improve resilience; and a new 'Irish Advantage' campaign will target Eurozone buyers to buy Irish innovation in key sectors.
- In recent weeks, EI launched its new Market Discovery Fund to help more Irish companies accelerate their market diversification efforts.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those who are interested in starting or growing their own business. The suite of LEO Brexit supports available to micro and small businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide include:

- Access to the 'Brexit SME Scorecard' online tool where micro and smaller businesses can self-diagnose their readiness for Brexit;
- A 'Technical Assistance for Micro-enterprises' grant designed to support qualifying businesses to diversify into new markets, enabling companies to explore and develop new market opportunities;
- Rollout of 'Lean for Micro' nationwide which will make small businesses more efficient and competitive;
- A 'LEO Innovation and Investment Fund' pilot programme to support innovation in micro-enterprises and get them investor ready to scale their businesses;
- Tailored mentoring to address Brexit related business challenges;
- Targeted training on specific Brexit challenges, including financial aspects and capability

building in innovation, competitiveness and opportunity diagnosis; and

- Continued information, advice and guidance across all 31 LEOs and regionally.

The additional Brexit supports on offer through the LEOs are focused on capability building, market diversification, driving increased competitiveness, and promoting innovation so that LEO client companies can better cope with the challenges arising on foot of Brexit and to explore any opportunities presented.

The Brexit Loan Scheme, which was announced in Budget 2018 and will be launched in March of this year, is a €300 million loan scheme offering working capital loans at interest rates of 4% or less to eligible Irish SMEs and small mid-caps of less than 500 employees. The scheme is 60% funded by my department, and the remaining 40% has been funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with the expectation that at least 40% of the fund will be drawn down by food businesses.

On the State Aid aspects, In November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager (who has responsibility for EU State aid policy). An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from DG Competition, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. The Working Group has met three times and in between these meetings, there has been engagement on specific issues in order to continue to progress matters. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

As one part of a suite of measures to mitigate against the effects of Brexit, a Rescue and Restructuring (R&R) Scheme notified to the Commission was approved in late November 2017. This scheme has been put in place as it is considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary.

On the Trade aspects, Enterprise Ireland is working with client companies through a network of market and sector advisers from 10 offices located throughout Ireland and 33 international offices across the globe. Along with additional staffing, 2017 also saw an enhanced programme of over 145 international trade events to target opportunities on a sectoral basis.

Enterprise Ireland's 2017-2020 Strategy aims to increase the diversification of client exports into new markets, with two-thirds of exports going beyond the UK.

On the 15th May 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched a new Eurozone Strategy to assist Irish exporters increase exports in Eurozone countries by 50%, from €4 billion to €6 billion by 2020. This strategy will be accompanied by a new 'Irish Advantage' communications campaign which will target Eurozone buyers to buy Irish innovation in key Brexit impacted sectors such as med-tech and engineering.

The diversification strategy is focused on geographical markets, and on diversifying into new market segments. The activities of Enterprise Ireland's overseas network are supported by the Market Research Centre and Strategic Marketing Unit based in Dublin along with a range of financial and capability developments supports aimed at helping client companies to achieve this growth in overseas markets.

In relation to Brexit related supports for farming that question would be best answered by my colleague Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Enterprise Ireland Funding

123. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the companies that received aid under the Enterprise Ireland stabilisation fund; the amount each company received; the ex-post analysis of the scheme that has been carried out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8909/18]

124. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies that received aid under the stabilisation fund that are still in business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8910/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

The Enterprise Stabilisation Fund (ESF) was established by Government to support viable but vulnerable exporting companies that were experiencing difficulties due to the economic crisis, which started in 2008. Client companies of Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Údarás Na Gaeltachta, and Shannon Development across all sectors within manufacturing and internationally traded services were eligible to apply. The fund was administered by Enterprise Ireland.

The State Aid basis for the Enterprise Stabilisation Fund was the Temporary Aid Framework 2008. Based on this derogation from the EU, the ESF was open for the years 2009 and 2010.

Enterprise Ireland approved €80.4 million under the non-competitive ESF and paid out €80.018 million. 223 companies were approved funding, and the average funding per enterprise was €375,000.

The majority of the companies supported are still trading as viable entities, and continue to contribute to the Irish economy. As of March 2017, over €22.5 million has been redeemed to date from companies that were legally in a position to do so. (A company must have distributable reserves to be in a position, legally, to repay the State. Redemption of the shares will continue to be sought from companies who fall into this category.

€15.72 million invested in ESF companies cannot be redeemed as the companies have been dissolved, liquidated, or gone into receivership.

The objective of the ESF was to retain jobs and ensure the continued survival and growth of these Enterprise Ireland client companies. In total, 9,500 jobs were supported as a result of the fund.

Table 1: total amount invested/drawn down by year over the period 2007-2010, under the Enterprise Stabilisation Fund.

Year	Investment Amount (€)
2007	180,337
2008	7,028,316
2009	56,029,434
2010	16,780,000
Grand Total	80,018,087

Ticket Touting

125. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation

the status of efforts to curb ticket touting; and the timeframe for the passing of legislation in this regard. [8976/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since receipt of the submissions to the public consultation on the resale of tickets, officials of my Department have engaged in follow-up discussions with sporting bodies, event promoters, consumer bodies, primary ticketing service providers and secondary ticket marketplaces. My officials have also liaised with public authorities in EU and EFTA member states with laws that prohibit or restrict ticket resale on the experience with, and effectiveness of, these laws. I am currently considering a range of options aimed at helping ensure that ticket markets work better for consumers in the light of these discussions and enquiries and of the responses to the public consultation. The outcome of this process will inform both me and the Government on the approach to be taken on this matter which I hope to be in a position to finalise in the near future.

Health Services Reports

126. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether Sláintecare is a comprehensive reform action plan or implementation plan for the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8846/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Sláintecare report represents a significant milestone in our political and health policy history. It is the first time in the history of the State that cross-party consensus of this scale has been achieved on health policy. It provides a once in a generation opportunity to achieve the most comprehensive reform of our health services ever undertaken and to improve health outcomes for our population. Having supported the work of the Committee since its establishment, I am eager to harness the consensus achieved to drive reform of our health services.

Implementing large-scale reform of this nature requires a significant programme of work, and this work is underway. It was acknowledged in the Sláintecare report that more detailed consideration of issues including key actions, deliverables, costings, timelines and key performance indicators would be required as part of the implementation process in Sláintecare.

To that end, my Department is currently preparing an implementation plan in response to the Sláintecare report. This process is at an advanced stage, and officials from my Department are now engaging with the Departments of the Taoiseach and Public Expenditure and Reform on this matter. It is my intention to bring this plan to Government shortly.

Health Services Reports

127. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the advice received by his Department in relation to the costings in Sláintecare; if his Department or others are costing the proposals separately; when this is expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8847/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Committee on the Future of Healthcare engaged the Centre for Health Policy in Trinity College Dublin to assist it with its deliberations. As part of this process, the Centre provided indicative costings for a range of recommended actions and these are outlined in the report. The Committee acknowledge in the report that these costings are only indicative, and that further work will be required by the Implementation Office, the Department of Health and the HSE to ensure effective investment in change.

As the Deputy is aware, I have been supportive of the work of the Committee since its establishment and believe the publication of the Sláintecare report provides us with a once in a generation opportunity to achieve the most comprehensive reform of our health services ever undertaken. The reform plans envisaged in the Sláintecare report will be a significant undertaking and need to be translated into a concrete and phased programme of work. In this regard, my Department is currently developing an implementation plan in response to the Sláintecare report. This process is at an advanced stage, and officials from my Department are now engaging with the Departments of the Taoiseach and Public Expenditure and Reform on this matter. It is my intention to bring proposals to Government in the near future. Consideration of costs is an important part of this process and this will be addressed in the implementation plan.

Health Services Reports

128. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the Sláintecare report; the timeframe for same; if he will meet with the members of the Select Committee on the Future of Healthcare in advance of publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8848/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Sláintecare report, produced by the Committee on the Future of Healthcare, represents a significant milestone in our political and health policy history. It is the first time that cross-party consensus of this scale has been achieved on health policy. It provides a once in a generation opportunity to achieve the most comprehensive reform of our health services ever undertaken and to improve health outcomes for our population.

Implementing a large-scale reform of this nature requires a significant programme of work, and this work is underway. My Department is currently preparing an implementation plan in response to the Sláintecare report. This process is at an advanced stage, and officials from my Department are now engaging with the Departments of the Taoiseach and Public Expenditure and Reform on this matter. It is my intention to bring proposals to Government in the near future. Recruitment is also underway for an Executive Director for the new dedicated Sláintecare Programme Office which is being established. I was also pleased to be able to announce a substantial commitment of nearly €11 billion to capital investment across our health services over the next decade as outlined in the National Development Plan published last week. This investment will support new capacity development and provide a catalyst for reform.

I will meet with a representative group from the Committee on the Future of Healthcare next week to provide a further update.

I am confident that the period ahead will see a notable advancement in the implementation of Sláintecare in a manner that will build momentum and support for the long-term reform of our health and social care services.

Hospital Charges

129. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos 287 and 359 of 12 December 2017, if he has made decisions based on the findings by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8859/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is currently considering the issue of the application of the public in-patient charge of €80 for venesection in Acute Hospitals

as well as broader issues in relation to the treatment of patients with Hereditary Haemochromatosis. A meeting involving relevant personnel in the HSE and the Department of Health is being arranged in that regard.

Hospital Appointments Status

130. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [8875/18]

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.

General Practitioner Services Provision

131. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a permanent general practitioner will be assigned to Waterville, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8878/18]

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

132. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the funding that has been spent on the National Treatment Purchase Fund in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8879/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As set out in the NTPF Audited Annual Financial Statements for 2016, the total expenditure by the NTPF in 2016 was €34,287,621, made up of €30,387,932 for patient care, and €3,899,689 for administrative expenses.

The NTPF did not have a direct role in the commissioning of patient treatments in 2016. The procurement of treatments was carried out by the HSE and the role of the NTPF was administration of the payments to the hospitals.

The 2017 Annual Financial Statements have not yet been completed. However I can con-

firm that the Department of Health provided an allocation of €20 million to the NTPF for 2017.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

133. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount that was spent in private hospitals here and outside the State in relation to the NTPF in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8880/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The NTPF has provided the following information in relation to their expenditure on Private and Voluntary Hospitals, both inside and outside the State, in the years from 2011 to 2016.

Year	Expenditure
2016	€30,387,932
2015	€21,345,689
2014	€0
2013	€4,262,636
2012	€22,999,528
2011	€56,784,944

Please note that the NTPF 2017 and 2018 Annual Financial Statements have not yet been completed and therefore the Department is not able to provide the comparable information for 2017 and 2018 at this time.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

134. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount that has been spent by the HSE to pay for procedures under the cross-border healthcare directive and the treatment abroad schemes in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8881/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursement of patients' of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State (Member State of Affiliation) and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level through the legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (Regulation 883/04). The Directive seeks to ensure a clear and transparent framework for the provision of cross-border healthcare within the EU, for those occasions where the care patients seek is provided in another Member State rather than in their home country. S.I. 203 of 2014 provides the legal basis for the Health Service Executive to operate the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland, including the reimbursement of the cost of treatment.

The HSE also operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme, for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation 883/04, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulation 987/09, and in accordance with Department of Health Guidelines.

As the HSE has responsibility for the administration of the Cross Border Directive and Treatment Abroad Scheme, I have asked the HSE to examine the issues raised and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

135. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8885/18]

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.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Administration

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be issued for a person (details supplied). [8888/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

137. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if sativex is available or being prescribed by general practitioners here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8889/18]

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.

On 11 July 2014, the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1988 were amended to allow for certain cannabis-based medicinal products to be used in Ireland. The Health Products Regulatory Authority subsequently granted a marketing authorisation for the cannabis-based medicinal product Sativex to be marketed in this State. It was then open to the holder of that authorisation to make the product available for prescribing in Ireland.

In September 2014, The HSE received an application for the reimbursement of Sativex.

A Health Technology Assessment on Sativex was completed by the NCPE, which did not recommend reimbursement of Sativex at the submitted price.

The HSE issued the manufacturers with notice of its intention not to reimburse.

On 9 February 2018 the HSE received a new reimbursement application from the manufacturer. A rapid review by the NCPE was commissioned on 12 February and this application will be assessed in line with the 2013 Act.

Vaccination Programme

138. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if immunocompromised groups of persons in need of immunisation from tuberculosis are being provided with the BCG vaccination; the measures he is undertaking to ensure there is a sufficient supply of the BCG vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8892/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Health Service Executive continues to experience on going delays with the supply of BCG vaccine. BCG vaccine stock in all areas expired at the end of April 2015 and as of today this continues to be a problem for Ireland and other countries in Europe that use this licensed BCG vaccine. Since this problem became apparent, the HSE National Immunisation Office (NIO) has been in regular contact with the manufacturer of BCG vaccine to ascertain when the vaccine might be available. There is only one licensed supplier of BCG vaccine to Ireland and this vaccine manufacturer has informed the NIO that the BCG vaccine will not be delivered into Ireland until late 2018 at the earliest. The NIO and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) have sought an alternative supply of BCG vaccine that meets safety, quality and effectiveness standards and that could be used in Ireland. To date no appropriate alternative manufacturer has been found. When there is confirmation of a date for a new supply, the HSE will be guided by the recommendations of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee on its administration.

Mental Health Services Provision

139. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of a matter (details supplied). [8893/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

140. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of day places available for training young adults with disabilities, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8898/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

141. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of school leaver places available to young persons with intellectual disabilities from September 2018; the number available in September 2016 and September 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8899/18]

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.

Home Care Packages Data

142. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the homecare budget, including home care packages and home help services in counties Cavan and Monaghan in 2017; the provision for such services in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8906/18]

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.

Question Heading for question(s) 143,144,145

143. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no child psychologist in the County Limerick early intervention service since May 2017. [8912/18]

144. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see a child psychologist in County Limerick. [8913/18]

145. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see a child psychologist in County Limerick, by the number of months waiting. [8914/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 to 145, inclusive, 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.

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

146. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons offered an opportunity to attend an assessment with a person (details supplied); the number that responded; the number that attended on the day; the number that have been subsequently put forward for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8915/18]

147. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if children with scoliosis attending from Temple Street Children's University Hospital have been offered access to assessment and surgery through a mechanism (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8916/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 147 together.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Staff

148. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a public health nurse will visit a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [8932/18]

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

HSE Properties

149. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to consider the use of a site (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8933/18]

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

Coroners Service

150. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when the details of the inquest of a person (details supplied) will be received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8937/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Coroners Act 1962, a Coroner is

an independent office holder with responsibility under the law for the medico-legal investigation of the circumstances of sudden, unexplained, violent and unnatural deaths. Any details in relation to an inquest into a death and when the details of such an inquest will be received is a matter for the Coroner.

Hospital Appointments Administration

151. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who attended an appointment was told to return home in view of the fact that there was no consultant on site to carry out the assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8938/18]

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.

EU Directives

152. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include chiropractors as a regulated profession; if his attention has been drawn to the way in which the Euratom directive is being implemented in other EU states; if he has had discussions with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8939/18]

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 and officials from my Department are in regular contact with that Department regarding the transposition.

My Department will finalise the medical provisions of the BSSD in the coming weeks.

Community Care

153. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason HSE performance reports since July 2016 suggest that no community intervention team service is available for the CHO1 area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8946/18]

154. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the community intervention team staffing levels by CHO area, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8947/18]

155. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the community intervention teams which are outsourced; the CHO areas they are in; the way in which outsourced staffing levels compare to directly employed HSE CIT staff by CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8948/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 to 155, inclusive, together.

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

Hospital Overcrowding

156. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent crisis in Temple Street Children's University Hospital (details supplied); the steps he has taken to ensure that this will not happen again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8952/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Tackling overcrowding in EDs is a key commitment of this Government and this year, as part of Budget 2018, an extra €30m was made available to respond to winter pressures in 2017, with a further €40m being provided in 2018.

I acknowledge that there continues to be an unacceptable number of patients waiting on trolleys throughout the system and I can assure the Deputy that this issue remains a priority for me and my Department.

In relation to Temple Street Children's Hospital, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

HSE Reports

157. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a report (details supplied) will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8953/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

158. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the HSE decision on access to the versatis patch pain medication which has been withdrawn; the legal powers he has in regard to such decisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8956/18]

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-license use for pain not associated with shingles.

An HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) review of this product highlighted that the clinical evidence for its use in PHN is limited due to lack of comparative data, and its value is uncertain for 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.

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 automatically receive this item under the community drugs schemes. In August 2017, the HSE advised GPs and pharmacies 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 4,700 applications from GPs, of which some

14% 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. The HSE advises that over 60% 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>.

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

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

159. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Health Service Executive shall not make the reimbursement of the costs of cross-border healthcare under EU regulations subject to prior authorisation except in circumstances in which it has been made subject to prior authorisation under regulation 12; the exceptions under regulation 12; the date the exceptions were made; the reason for the exceptions, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8957/18]

160. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether in the ordinary course of requiring medical treatments that the spirit of the cross border EU regulations not to require prior authorisation is being thwarted by the information on the HSE website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8958/18]

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

The Cross Border Directive provides rules for the reimbursement of patients of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level through the legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (Regulation 883/04). The Directive seeks to ensure a clear and transparent framework for the provision of cross border healthcare within the EU, for those occasions where the care patients seek is provided in another Member State rather than in their home country.

The HSE, as the National Contact Point (NCP) for the Directive has the responsibility to ensure Irish patients who seek to have healthcare abroad under the terms of the Directive are assisted with access to the information they need to make an informed choice. The HSE advises where a patient is in any doubt as to the need to seek prior authorisation before availing of a consultation or treatment abroad to contact the NCP. The NCP will advise patients of the reimbursement rate that will apply to the assessment/treatment being accessed.

Regarding prior authorisation of healthcare, Article 8 of the Directive permits this in certain circumstances and was transposed into Irish law by Regulation 12 of S.I. 2013 of 2014 on 14 July 2014. Regulation 12 lists the circumstances where the HSE may specify particular cross-border healthcare as subject to prior authorisation. These circumstances are as follows:

(a) involves planning requirements relating to the object of ensuring sufficient and permanent access to a balanced range of high quality treatment in the State, or the wish to control

costs or avoid, as far as possible, any waste of financial, technical and human resources, and -

(i) involves overnight hospital accommodation of the insured person for at least one night, or

(ii) requires the use of highly specialised and cost-intensive medical infrastructure or medical equipment,

(b) involves treatments presenting a particular risk for a patient, or,

(c) is provided by a healthcare provider that, on a case-by-case basis, could give rise to serious and specific concerns relating to the quality or safety of the care, with the exception of healthcare which is subject to European Union legislation ensuring a minimum level of safety and quality throughout the European Union.

However, the HSE may refuse to grant prior authorisation in the following circumstances:

(a) the patient will, according to a clinical evaluation, be exposed with reasonable certainty to a patient-safety risk that cannot be regarded as acceptable, taking into account the potential benefit for the person of the sought cross-border healthcare;

(b) the general public will be exposed with reasonable certainty to a substantial safety hazard as a result of the cross-border healthcare in question;

(c) the healthcare is to be provided by a healthcare provider that raises serious and specific concerns relating to the respect of standards and guidelines on quality of care and patient safety, including provisions on supervision, whether these standards and guidelines are laid down by laws and regulations or through accreditation systems established by the Member State of treatment; or

(d) the Health Service Executive can provide healthcare that is the same as, or equivalent to, the healthcare sought by the patient within a time limit which is medically justifiable, taking into account the patient's current state of health at the time the decision under this Regulation is taken and the probable course of the medical condition to which the healthcare relates.

Nevertheless, a patient may, if they wish, request prior authorisation for any procedure regardless of whether or not this is required under Regulation 12. This has the advantage for the patient as they will receive an indication of the level of reimbursement to expect and also an assurance they are complying with any conditions necessary under the terms of the Directive.

As the HSE has responsibility for the administration of the Cross Border Directive I have asked the HSE to examine the issues raised concerning the information on the Cross Border Directive on its website and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff

161. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not been facilitated to return to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8959/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

162. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that assessment of needs policy has changed in County Mayo; if children must now have a pre-diagnosis before being accepted for assessment of needs appointments; if the policy has changed; if this policy has changed nationwide; if it is restricted to County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8960/18]

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 Card Applications

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8977/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Administration

164. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to contact the relevant authorities with a view to expediting an urgent appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9019/18]

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.

Rural Development Programme

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress to date in the implementation of key rural development initiatives as contained in the rural development programme 2014 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8970/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 represents a substantial investment, by both the EU and the National Exchequer, in the agri-food sector and in Irish farmers. The Programme is co-funded by the EU's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to a sum of €2.19 billion over the programme lifespan. This EU funding is supplemented by exchequer funding bringing the total allocation to €4 billion, a substantial vote of confidence in Irish farming.

The programme covers a suite of measures both ambitious and broad, and supports all farming sectors. These measures reflect the issues, challenges and opportunities which Irish agriculture faces, and were put in place after lengthy consultation and analysis. The Programme aims to enhance competitiveness, to encourage more sustainable farming practices and to deliver real and quantifiable results for rural communities and the rural economy generally. Achieving these results is very much dependant on farmers engaging with and participating in the various schemes and initiatives on offer, and I am pleased to say that, as with previous RDP programmes in Ireland, farmers are enthusiastically signing up to schemes under this RDP.

In fact, Ireland leads other Member States in terms of our implementation of the Rural Development Programme and currently has the second highest rate of drawn-down of EU funds among all Member States. The average EU financial rate for draw down of funds up to the end of December 2017 was 25.9%, whereas Ireland's execution rate was 44.3%. This progress is testament to the successful roll-out, uptake and implementation of schemes under the Programme to date.

I fully anticipate that based on current up-take and projections, the entire budget allocation of some €4 billion for the Rural Development Programme will be spent and that the entire €2.19 billion of EU co-funding will be drawn down. It is expected that the majority of funds will be spent by the end of 2020, although there will be some carry-over. Under EU regulations governing the Rural Development Programme, funds for multi-annual commitments entered into by the end of 2020 may be claimed up to the end of 2023. RDP spending is also subject to the annual estimates process and budgetary rules, but this should not affect the overall spend and any EAFRD funds unspent in a year are carried forward to subsequent years.

In terms of RDP participation levels, I am pleased to say that there has been excellent uptake to date. At this stage of the programme, some multi-annual schemes such as GLAS, BDGP and the Organic Farming Schemes are fully subscribed. Other schemes such as ANC are applied for on an annual basis, and others such as TAMS will continue to recruit participants in tranches.

Reaching the targets set out within the RDP is central to meeting the objectives of the Programme and to producing the desired results and outcomes. It is therefore important that progression toward these targets is kept under review. To this end, and in line with EU regulatory requirements, my Department carries out an annual review of implementation by reporting on indicators collected on all schemes and measures. This Annual Implementation Report, and a Citizens Summary on the results of this assessment is, once approved by the Commission, published on the Department's website. We will continue to review the implementation of the pro-

gramme to ensure that we are on target to meet all identified objectives and that all EU funding is fully drawn down.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

166. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application for a single farm payment by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8833/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A 2017 Basic Payment Application was received from the person named on 27 April 2017.

Following processing, an error was identified relating to land that formed part of another applicant's forestry contract. An official of my Department has made direct contact with the person named and outlined the position. My Department will pay the person named on the remaining land pending a resolution of the forestry issue.

Payment will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named in the coming days.

GLAS Payments

167. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their balancing GLAS payment for 2016; his views on whether it is fair that due to information technology incompetence the person must wait 16 months for their payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8844/18]

168. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their balancing GLAS payment for 2017; his views on whether it is fair that due to information technology incompetence the person must wait 16 months for their payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8845/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 168 together.

The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full payments in respect of 2015 and the 2016 scheme advance payment.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that resulted in the subsequent payments not being made. A solution has been identified and the 2016 balance payment is expected to issue shortly. GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis.

Fishery Harbour Centres

169. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contractual commitments contained within the €7.98 million funding recently announced for Killybegs harbour centre; if only €2.9 million of the funding is newly acquired in view of the fact that the €5.08 million allocated for contractual commitments represents previous funding commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8902/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Killybegs

Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

To provide for the necessary safety, maintenance and ongoing development of the six Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl, my Department administers the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Capital Development Programme. In line with normal budgetary processes, funds are made available on an annual basis for these purposes.

In the period 2010 to 2017, €12.7 million has been spent on maintenance and development works at Killybegs. In 2018 I have allocated a further €7.98 million in funding for capital works in Killybegs.

The size and nature of some of the projects now being undertaken in Killybegs, taking on board operational considerations, has necessitated a phasing of the projects in addition to funding which straddles more than one year.

The circa €14m Smooth Point project at Killybegs currently underway will deliver a much needed **120 metres** of additional berthing space. The project commenced with phase 1 in 2017 when €1.5m was spent, this was in addition to €0.4 million spent on project preparations in 2016. In 2018 I have allocated €4.87 million to the Smooth Point Project, €3.47m for the completion of Phase 1 and €1.4m for the commencement of Phase 2 of the upgrade. It is expected that the project will be completed in late 2019.

Similarly with the Landing Pier upgrade project, work commenced on the structural (pier fendering and berthing dolphin) phase of this project in 2017 when €2m was spent, following on from €0.5m which was spent in 2016 on project preparation. I have allocated a further €1.26 million for the completion of these works in 2018. In addition I have provided €1 million for electrical upgrade element of the works which commences this year and is expected to be completed in 2019.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8987/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials from the Inheritance Enquiry Unit of my Department wrote to the Personal Representatives of the second person named in August 2012 requesting the usual testamentary documents and also outlining procedures for the transfer of schemes in which the person named was involved.

A further letter was issued in May 2014 advising that payments would issue to the Representatives of the second named person above when the required documents are received.

The Department continues to await further instruction on the matter.

Broadband Service Provision

171. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure that a high speed fibre optic broadband connection is provided to a location (details supplied) in view of the fact that the lack of such a connection is putting jobs at risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8858/18]

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, almost 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. 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. Premises in the area referred to by the Deputy are in a BLUE area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. They are therefore in an area where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

While I have no statutory authority to intervene in the day to day operations of commercial operators, my Department is collating information in relation to individual cases where commercial plans to provide access to high speed broadband to premises within a BLUE area do not materialise. I would encourage businesses in the referred area to provide my Department broadband@dccae.gov.ie with details of the attempts made by the businesses to access a high speed broadband connection, with a view to my Department engaging further on this issue.

Illegal Dumping

172. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of prosecutions and convictions, respectively, for illegal dumping and on-the-spot fines in Dublin city since 2012, by local area district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8917/18]

173. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of prosecutions and convictions, respectively, for illegal dumping since 2012, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8918/18]

174. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent in Dublin city on the removal of illegal waste in each year since 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8919/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 to 174, inclusive, together.

Enforcement actions against illegal waste activity are a matter for the Local Authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE) within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department does not compile statistics in relation to prosecutions taken or fines imposed. Information is available through the Local Government Management Agency's series of service indicators annual reports available from the publications section of the LGMA's website <http://www.lgma.ie/en/publication-category/service-indicator-reports-2004-2010> and the enforcement section of the EPA's website <http://www.epa.ie/enforcement/prosecute/>. The cost of illegal dumping is not collated by my Department as it includes local authority enforcement, disposal and legal costs and also involves costs for other State agencies such as An Garda Síochána.

Illegal dumping is first and foremost a matter of individual responsibility and compliance

with the law. While enforcement action in this area is a matter in the first instance for local authorities, the Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education and, as such, the Department provides funding to support the activities of the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) of approximately €1 million per annum and of the network of local authority waste enforcement officers of approximately €7.4 million per annum. Dublin City Council receives an annual grant of €982,000 in this regard.

In addition, the Department has developed an Anti-Dumping Initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. The 2017 Anti-Dumping Initiative saw funding of €1.26 million provided by the Department which supported 229 projects across the country. This year, I am increasing the allocation to €2 million to build on the momentum that has now been created and to provide for an increased focus on identifying and prosecuting illegal dumpers.

Metropolitan Area Networks Programme

175. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question Nos 604 and 607 of 23 May 2017 and in relation to the report of the taskforce implementation group concerning taskforce action number 19, if the pricing review of the MANS network is complete; his plans to publish the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9010/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In the context of Action 19 of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which was to explore whether take up of the MANs could be improved, a review of the MANs was commissioned by the Department and carried out by independent consultants. The review examined the operation of the MANs by the Management Services Entity, enet, which manages and operates the MANs on behalf of the State, and considered the access arrangements and pricing of the MANs to ensure that the MANs are being operated and managed by the Management Services Entity in accordance with the terms of the MSE Concession Agreements.

The pricing Review of the MANs is currently undergoing a verification process with the consultants who carried out the review and will be completed as soon as possible. It is my intention to publish the report thereafter.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

176. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has been notified of force majeure circumstance by a company (details supplied) in relation to its NBP commitment agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9011/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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. Storm Ophelia, which hit our shores on 16th October 2017, caused extensive damage to infrastructure across

the country. I understand from eir that necessary resources were redirected to affected areas in order to restore service. I informed the House of this when responding to Questions on 14 November last.

In accordance with the obligations of the Commitment Agreement, officials from my Department meet with eir on a monthly basis to review the company's performance on their ongoing rural deployment project.

Officials from my Department were informed by eir that its Q4 targets would be impacted by the effects of Storm Ophelia. In line with the force majeure terms of the Commitment Agreement and, with the Department's approval, eir's Q4 2017 target for listed eircodes passed under their rural deployment was adjusted from approximately 30,000 to approximately 20,000.

According to figures now verified by my Department eir reached this revised target with an overall total of 121,000 listed eircodes passed as of December 2017. I further understand that eir, in the process of including extra premises in their rollout where the situation on the ground required or allowed for, have in fact covered a total of 131,000 premises passed as of December 2017.

As mentioned previously my Department is in regular contact with eir in relation to their ongoing deployment and the Commitment Agreement and will continue this engagement with the aim of ensuring the requirements of the Commitment Agreement are met.

Telecommunications Services Provision

177. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 1008 of 13 July 2017, the top five blackspots by county for mobile coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9013/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Under Action 17 of the December 2016 Report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, my Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

In 2017, both Departments worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. The pilot exercise has since been completed, with all local authorities now being asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is ongoing, and has been included in the 2018 Taskforce Work Programme. It is planned to have dedicated GIS resources in place to support this.

Under Action 40 of the 2016 Report, a review was conducted to identify recommendations to address blackspots. This work is continuing in 2018 under a focus group to inform future policy development and initiatives, in providing guidance with respect to specific categories of locations where high quality mobile phone coverage should be made available as a priority taking account of customer expectations.

Metropolitan Area Networks Programme

178. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date on which changes to clawback arrangements of MANS enhancements

were adopted; if the new arrangements were applied retrospectively from the date of adoption; if there is or likely to be a net cost to the State from this change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9014/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): New clawback arrangements in respect of enhancements to the MANs under the MSE I Concession Agreement were agreed with the concessionaire on 15 March 2017. The clawback period was reduced from the final ten years to the final five years of the Concession Agreement, which is due to expire in March 2030.

The purpose of the clawback arrangements is to incentivise ongoing enhancement of the MANs infrastructure by the concessionaire in the final years of the MSE Agreement. The payments under the clawback provisions will fall due at the expiry of the MSE I Agreement in 2030, and there should be a net benefit to the State from the reduction of the clawback period from ten to five years.

Broadband Service Provision

179. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises passed under the Eircom commitment contract in Q2, Q3 and Q4 of 2017 that were deployed by means of eVDSL, LR-VDSL or were otherwise not fibre-to-the-premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9015/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The number of eVDSL premises passed by eir under the terms of the April 2017 Commitment Agreement for the three Quarters referenced by the Deputy is set out below:

Quarter 2 2017: 0 premises

Quarter 3 2017: 2,918 premises

Quarter 4 2017: 392 premises

Premises passed will now be able to avail of eVDSL enabled services which include speeds from 30Mbps up to and including 100Mbps. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup>. Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Of the 300K planned rural deployment, my Department has verified that eir has passed a total of 121,000 premises as at Quarter 4 2017.

A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Broadband Service Provision

180. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 587 of 23 May 2017, his plans to issue a policy direction to a body (details supplied) in relation to the coverage conditions, as opposed to the allocation method, or of spectrum licences in the 700MHz band; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9016/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): A Decision has been adopted at EU level in order to co-ordinate the release the

694-790MHz (700MHz) spectrum band in all Member States by 30 June 2020. This proposal will allow mobile broadband services to use this part of the spectrum band.

The EU Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy highlights the importance of this band for ensuring the provision of broadband services in rural areas. The band is particularly attractive for wireless broadband services, allowing higher speeds and greater coverage over long distances.

In Ireland, the 700MHz band is currently used by digital terrestrial television services (DTT) and to meet the timeline of June 2020 for clearance of broadcasting services from this band, my Department and ComReg have been working to ensure the necessary measures are taken to facilitate a clearance of the spectrum. This work is being carried out with the cooperation of RTÉ (as owner and operator of the two DTT public service multiplexes) and its subsidiary, 2m, as the owner and operator of the national broadcasting transmission network.

Ireland does not foresee any difficulties which may prevent the signing of cross-border agreements with relevant countries. ComReg and my department have fully engaged in the necessary technical and policy cross-border coordination work with the UK authorities and, in that regard, the date of 4 September 2019 has been identified as the start date for the coordinated migration of terrestrial broadcasting services from this spectrum band in both jurisdictions.

This date represents the beginning of a period of simulcast, which is designed to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that those households that rely solely on the Saorview DTT service can undertake the necessary preparations without undue interruption to their reception of that service. It is considered that the period of simulcast will end by March 2020 and, at that time, all terrestrial broadcast transmissions in the 700MHz band will be required to cease.

The management of radio spectrum is a matter for ComReg, which is independent in the exercise of its functions, including the future allocation of the 700MHz band and any terms and conditions attached to any licenses issued. Having regard to the independence of ComReg in the matter, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time. I have no reason to believe that any process undertaken by ComReg will not result in the fair allocation of any future spectrum assignment and I expect the outcomes of any such process to provide a level of certainty and transparency for all stakeholders.

National Driver Licensing Service

181. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the NDLS insist on the presentation of the new public services card for issuing learner permits; if other identification such as a passport is adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8842/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): If I may first clarify a point, the Public Services Card (PSC) is currently required when presenting for the Driver Theory Test, and is not asked for as part of the application process for the learner permit.

Numerous Government Departments and agencies offer services to the public which require robust ID provisions. The consequence over many years has been that members of the public are put through a series of different and time-consuming processes in order to prove their identity when dealing with different public bodies.

In order to reduce this burden on both the citizen and the State, the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 - the legislative basis for the PSC - provided for all Government Departments

and a range of public bodies, referred to in the Act as ‘specified bodies’, to request the PSC as part of transactions such as application processes. The intention was to enable people to have one point where they could verify their ID for public services, which they could then use to access other public services.

While the Road Safety Authority, which has responsibility for the National Driver Licensing Service, did not exist in 2005, it was later added to the list of ‘specified bodies’.

The requirement introduced in June 2016 for applicants for the driver theory test to produce a PSC is part of the gradual roll-out of this ID process.

Sports Capital Programme

182. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to launch a new sports capital programme in 2018; the expected date for such a launch; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8849/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) closed for applications on the 24th February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. In November and December last, Minister Ross and I announced €60m in allocations to a record 1,800 projects under the 2017 round of the SCP. Full details of all these allocations are available on my Department’s website and the priority in the medium term will be on advancing these projects.

In relation to future rounds of the SCP, my Department is undertaking a review of the 2017 round with a view to making recommendations on how to improve the process for future calls. This work is also examining what is feasible in terms of the scale and timing of the next round. I expect this review to be complete in the coming months and an announcement regarding the next round will be made at that stage.

Road Projects Status

183. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 519 of 21 January 2018, when works on an upgrade between the Rath roundabout and Kilmoon Cross on the N2 are expected to commence and conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8851/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As indicated previously to the Deputy in relation to this section of road on the N2, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Questions - Written Answers
Driver Test Waiting Lists

184. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting times for driving tests, by centre and county. [8876/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested is available on the Road Safety Authority website at www.rsa.ie, and is updated weekly.

Road Traffic Offences

185. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on imposing increased safety requirements on the use of quad bikes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8884/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is already comprehensive legislation in place governing the use of scrambler bikes, quad bikes and similar small vehicles in a public place. For the purposes of the Road Traffic Acts, a “public place” means any public road, and any street, road or other place to which the public have access with vehicles whether as by right or by permission and whether subject to or free of charge. The use of such vehicles in other areas, such as in parks and on private land, is beyond the jurisdiction of my Department.

Where quad bikes and scramblers are used on public roads they are treated as any other mechanically propelled vehicle, and irrespective of engine capacity, they fall within the remit of road traffic legislation.

The user of such vehicles must have insurance, road tax and a driving licence, and must also wear a helmet, with severe penalties (including fixed charge notices, penalty points, fines and possible seizure of the vehicle) under road traffic laws for not being in compliance with these requirements.

Quad bikes, scramblers bikes and similar vehicles which are being used in a public place must also comply with the requirements of Regulations concerning roadworthiness, which cover essential matters such as brakes, steering, mirrors, safety glass, wipers, headlamps, rear lighting, indicators and reflectors. Vehicles which do not meet these requirements may not be driven in a public place under road traffic legislation.

Enforcement of all road traffic legislation is a matter for an Garda Síochána.

Public Transport Data

186. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of complaints received on an annual basis by Irish Rail, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann in each of the years 2013 to 2017, in tabular form; the nature of these complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8887/18]

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

Vehicle Testing

187. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a facility to test commercial and heavy goods vehicles will be provided in south County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8923/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006), the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has responsibility for the operation, oversight, development, quality assurance and delivery of commercial vehicle roadworthiness testing arrangements.

I have therefore forwarded this Question to the RSA for direct reply to the Deputy. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Guardians Ad Litem

188. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the regulation of the guardian ad litem service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8886/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am working to reform the current Guardian ad litem arrangements for children in child care proceedings. The objectives of these reforms are to extend the Guardian ad litem system to benefit the greatest number of children and young people, and to provide a service that is high quality and sustainable into the future.

In response to the Joint Committee for Children and Youth Affairs recommendations that the new Guardian ad litem service be set up as a statutory independent body from the outset, I secured Government approval in December 2017 to establish a new national Guardian ad litem service within an Executive Office in my Department. This will be done on an interim basis with a view to longer term arrangements for the Executive Office being dealt with in the context of the proposed transition to a Family Courts system. I have revised the General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill, published in January 2017, to reflect this change.

The revised General Scheme, which will be published on my Department's website very shortly, also addresses further recommendations made by the Joint Committee in relation to providing an appropriate voice and equal opportunity to be heard for a child in child care proceedings and in respect of the status and powers of the Guardian ad litem.

I and my Department are working to finalise the Child Care (Amendment) Bill as early as possible in 2018. We are also advancing preparatory work on the establishment of the new Executive Office with a view to having it operational as soon as is practicable following enactment of the legislation.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

189. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the membership, names and qualifications of the selection panel for the collaborative forum in relation to the Commission of Investigation into the Mother and Baby Homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8920/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As I advised the House last week, I am in the process of setting up the Selection Panel to oversee the independent selection of representatives to a Collaborative Forum of former residents of mother and baby homes and related institutions.

The establishment of the Collaborative Forum is a new approach in the State's response to the theme of "nothing about us without us" which emerged from my consultations with former residents and their advocates. This innovative approach will facilitate and empower former residents to actively contribute to decisions on matters of concern to them and their families.

I have published a Charter for the Forum which sets out the general functions of the Forum; provides a blueprint for its programme of work, and details key principles in the methodology and approach to be adopted in this important work.

The establishment of an effective selection process is essential to the successful commencement of this project. For this reason I have identified some key persons and organisations from the areas of human rights promotion and protection, former residents and their advocacy groups, and academics with professional experience in relevant areas.

My Department has made the necessary contacts and I am awaiting confirmation of a response from a number of those approached to assist in this process.

I hope to be in a position to announce more details of the selection panel by next week.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

190. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the orders of discovery have been wholly complied with by the religious congregations that are the subject of those orders further to the third interim report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, section 2.12. [8922/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters is independent in the conduct of its investigations.

The issue raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the Commission and I have no further information or role in this regard.

Child Care Services Funding

191. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding allocated for the upgrading of existing childcare accommodation in counties Cavan and Monaghan and the provision of new childcare facilities in 2017; the number of new childcare places provided; the funding drawn down by the end of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8982/18]

192. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding allocated for the upgrading of existing childcare accommodation and the provision of new childcare facilities in 2017; the number of new childcare places provided; the funding drawn down by the end of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8983/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 191 and 192 together as they relate to 2017's Capital funding programmes for childcare, both nationally and in relation to Counties Cavan and Monaghan.

In 2017, €12.4m in total was made available for the 2017 Early Years and School Age Capital programmes, with a view to improving the quality and capacity of childcare services in Ireland. This amount was allocated in full following a competitive appraisal process.

An estimated 6,093 childcare places were created as a direct result of this funding.

The funding strands for 2017 Early Years and School Age Capital programmes were as follows:

Early Years Strand 1 - New places

Early Years Strand 2 - Building improvements and maintenance

Early Years Strand 3 - Natural Outdoor Play Area

School Age Childcare Strand A - Establishment of new SAC

School Age Childcare Strand B - Expansion of existing SAC

School Age Childcare Strand C - Improvement of existing SAC

The latest figures available (February 19th 2018) detail the total sum of contract values under both 2017 Early Years and School Age Capital programmes as €11,193,295.

Strand of capital funding	Sum of Contract Value (19/2/18)
Early Years Capital 2017_S1	€3,449,199.93
Early Years Capital 2017_S2	€2,094,840.47
Early Years Capital 2017_S3	€2,076,342.24
School Aged Childcare 2017_SA	€1,340,711.35
School Aged Childcare 2017_SB	€1,001,419.47
School Aged Childcare 2017_SC	€1,190,781.60
Total	€11,153,295.06

Per your query, as of 31st December 2017, a total of €10,804,758 of this had been drawn down.

Strand of capital funding	Drawn-down (31/12/17)
Early Years Capital 2017_S1	€3,204,538
Early Years Capital 2017_S2	€2,009,171
Early Years Capital 2017_S3	€1,977,702
School Aged Childcare 2017_SA	€1,281,266
School Aged Childcare 2017_SB	€957,527
School Aged Childcare 2017_SC	€1,125,671
Total	€10,804,758

The remaining balance awaiting draw-down at this point can in part be attributed to successful applicants not having reported on their capital works - and therefore not being able to complete draw-down - by year's end, for which many applied for and received extensions in acknowledgement of their particular circumstances.

It should be noted that the 2018 Capital programmes, which are intended to operate on a significantly earlier and co-ordinated timeline for delivery, with appraisal decisions due in May

2018, should assist providers in achieving their goals of completing works and final draw-down by year's end.

With respect to your query regarding Cavan and Monaghan, I can inform you that, as of 19th February 2018, the total value of contracts issued under the 2017 Capital programmes in the two counties was €533,168.34.

This funding directly resulted in the creation of an estimated 230 new childcare places.

A breakdown of these figures is as follows:

Cavan and Monaghan	Sum of Contract Value
Early Years Capital 2017_Strand 1	€200,000.00
Early Years Capital 2017_Strand 2	€135,344.00
Early Years Capital 2017_Strand 3	€47,853.19
School Aged Childcare 2017_Strand A	€19,599.00
School Aged Childcare 2017_Strand B	€59,215.00
School Aged Childcare 2017_Strand C	€71,157.15
Total	€533,168.34

At present the application process for Early Years and School Age Capital 2018 is underway, and I hope that it can build on the successes of 2017's programmes, increasing the quality and capacity of childcare services in all counties in Ireland.

Child Care Services Funding

193. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding allocated for 2018 towards upgrading of existing childcare accommodation and the provision of new childcare facilities; the number of new childcare places to be provided with the assistance of such grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8984/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The budget allocated to Early Years and School Age Childcare Capital programmes for 2018 is €6.86 million. The programmes will operate under the following five strands:

Early Years Care and Education

Strand 1: New or expanding services; €50k maximum grant size

Strand 2: Essential maintenance; €20k maximum grant size

Strand 3: Natural outdoor play area; €7k maximum grant size

School Age Childcare

Strand 4: New or expanding services; €20k maximum grant size

Strand 5: Essential maintenance; €5k maximum grant size

Grant funding under each strand will be allocated in a competitive process, for which applications opened on 12th February 2018 and will remain open until 3pm on Friday 9th March 2018. Full details can be found in the applicant guidelines.

Of the five strands of funding available, Strands 1 (Early Years) and 4 (School Age) relate

specifically to the creation of new childcare places. In predicting the outcomes of these strands at such an early stage, it is important to note that every application for funding is subject to a number of variables. For example, for Strand 1 (Early Years), applicants may apply for any amount between €20,000 and €50,000 in grant funding; for Strand 4 (School Age), the equivalent amount is between €3,000 and €20,000. Individual projects for these strands can exceed the maximum available grant but evidence of funding for the full project must be demonstrated.

Further to this, there is a large variance in the amount of childcare places that must be created per grant approved under each strand. In early years services, the age group for which places are being created is a significant factor. As you will be aware, childcare regulations require different staff ratios and floor-space per child. This is considered in the design of the Early Years capital programme so that, for example, under Strand 1 (Early Years), applicants must create a minimum of either 3 new places for 0-1 year olds, 5 new places for 1-3 year olds, or 11 new places for ECCE (3-5 year old) children.

For an applicant seeking funding under Strand 4 (School Age), the minimum amount of places to be created is determined by whether the project for which funding is sought is a relocation/expansion project (11 places), or a new build project (8 places).

At this early stage, and given the variables mentioned above, it is not possible to give an accurate prediction of the amount of new childcare places to be created under the Early Years and School Age Capital programmes in 2018. In particular, it will not be possible to estimate how many places might be created - and for which age groups - until the appraisal process is concluded in May 2018.

As the Minister I am committed to continuing to ensure access to high quality and affordable childcare. To this regard I ensured that childcare capacity was identified as a strategy priority in the recently published National Planning Framework which attracted additional funding of €250m in the National Development Plan. I am also committed to further research to comprehensively identify the capacity needs of the sector which may emerge over the next decade.

Local Improvement Scheme

194. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the €1 million in funding secured for local improvement schemes in County Cork will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8911/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is a programme for improvement works on small private/non public roads and has been funded in the past by the Department of the Environment and Local Government and subsequently by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

There has been very little funding available for this scheme in recent years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country.

I therefore announced the provision of €10 million to Local Authorities for a Local Improvement Scheme last September. Based on demand and the capacity of Local Authorities to complete works before the end of 2017, I allocated an additional €7.4 million to Local Authorities for LIS roads at the end of November.

€1 million was allocated to Co. Cork under the first LIS allocation in September 2017. An additional €151,985 was allocated to Co. Cork under the second round of allocations, bring-

ing the overall allocation for Cork to €1,151,985 in 2017. Cork County Council drew down €1,055,313 of that allocation by the payments deadline of 31st December 2017.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland, and I have therefore secured an allocation of €10 million for the scheme in my Department's Estimate for 2018. I intend to announce details of the 2018 scheme, including the allocations for each county, later this month.

Rural Development Policy

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans for the development of programmes for which his Department has responsibility throughout the entire country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8965/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Taoiseach's decision to establish the Department of Rural and Community Development was an important one for communities throughout the country. It underlines the Government's commitment to ensuring that the economic recovery can be felt by every community and that we build greater resilience for the future. My Department's role is to enable economic development through the creation of jobs and the infrastructure required to support those jobs, and to support our communities to become sustainable and desirable places to live, work and raise families.

Our vision is that all communities will have the opportunity to grow and develop economically and socially. To help bring this about, the Department will work across Government to:

- Create the conditions to support increased economic opportunities and local employment in all areas of the country
- Deliver schemes and programmes that support the revitalisation of towns and villages
- Improve access to services and social networks that ensure a high quality of life
- Enable communities disadvantaged by location or social issues to reach their full potential now and in the future
- Support all communities to be able to have a voice in shaping their own futures and addressing their common goals

Ireland is a dynamic place. Every day I see examples of the dynamism and ability to adapt that are happening right across Ireland. It is local communities which are driving and delivering economic growth regionally and throughout the entire country. The Government must enable and harness that potential and it is crucial that there is access to the services that are necessary to thrive in the 21st century economy.

The Government launched Project Ireland 2040 on 16 February last. This initiative emphasises social outcomes and values ahead of economic targets, and, outlines how Ireland should develop over the next 20 years, and where best to direct major capital spending. It prioritises the wellbeing of all of our people, wherever they live, and whatever their background, and it is a plan for both rural and urban Ireland.

In Budget 2018, my Department secured in excess of €220 million giving us the foundation we need to drive both the rural and community agenda and to deliver initiatives that can foster growth right across the country.

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My Department delivers a variety of programmes that provide support for the sustainable development of communities in line with commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development. These schemes and programmes include flagship programmes such as the LEADER and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation (SICAP) Programmes, the Community Services Programme, RAPID, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR Programme, the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS), the Dormant Accounts Fund, Seniors Alert Scheme and the Communities Facilities Scheme.

I am proud of the role my Department is playing in the rollout of the National Broadband Plan which aims to provide high-speed broadband access to all areas of the country.

There has been real progress since 2017 right across Government in implementing the Action Plan for Rural Development. In 2018, I will continue to place a strong emphasis on delivery of actions across Government and developing strong policy frameworks to support rural development. My interests are not only in the work and investment of my own Department but the work and investments of Departments right across Government. Every Department of the State must be involved if we are going to deliver balanced growth, equal opportunities and modern services no matter where you live in Ireland.

All schemes are open to applications from relevant parties during the application timeframes set for each scheme or programme.

My Department will continue to work with key stakeholders including local authorities, community and voluntary groups, and dedicated agencies to support job creation, attract tourism investment and to contribute to sustainable economic development in all communities throughout Ireland. The Department will ensure that maximum use is obtained from the resources allocated and that value for money is delivered in respect of the 2018 schemes.

A key priority is to ensure better alignment, consolidation and integration of programmes across the Department, while we will also focus on cross-Departmental and whole-of Government approaches with a view to achieving greater impact and effectiveness in the delivery of our supports to communities.

Further information on schemes and programmes, including the Action Plan for Rural Development, can be found on my Department's website www.drkd.gov.ie.

Action Plan for Rural Development

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to facilitate long-term sustainable economic and social progress across rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8966/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Government has made clear its support for the long-term economic and social development of rural Ireland in Project Ireland 2040 which was launched last week.

The National Planning Framework, which is one of the twin strands of Project Ireland 2040, specifically commits to maintaining Ireland's rural fabric and to reversing rural population decline. It also highlights the continued potential of the traditional pillars of the rural economy to support job creation in areas such as tourism and agriculture, as well as the opportunities that will arise through new technologies and investment.

Under the National Development Plan, the Government has committed to establishing a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which will provide an additional €1 billion over the next ten years to support rural renewal. Other funding streams in the National Development Plan, across sectors such as transport, tourism, energy and communications, will also support rural areas.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development will also continue to support the economic and social development of rural areas through short-to-medium term actions across Government. The Action Plan contains over 270 measures to build sustainable communities, support enterprise and employment, maximise our rural tourism and recreation potential, foster culture and creativity, and improve rural infrastructure and connectivity.

A second six-monthly Progress Report on the implementation of the Action Plan will be published in the coming weeks.

National Broadband Plan

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress to date in respect of the two regional broadband action groups, with particular reference to the provision of an efficient broadband network across rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8967/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department co-funds a Broadband Officer in each Local Authority to act as a single point of contact for industry in relation to broadband and mobile phone services.

My Department has also established two Regional Action Groups to provide a coordinated approach to this work across Local Authorities and to identify and address obstacles to the rollout of telecoms infrastructure. Each Local Authority is represented on one of the Action Groups by their Broadband Officer.

A number of sub-groups have been established to progress individual work streams associated with the rollout of a high-speed broadband network, including in the areas of Digital Strategies, Scenario Planning, Environmental Assessment, and Engagement with Industry. Significant progress has been made in relation to all of these issues through the Regional Action Groups and also the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Group.

A key deliverable of the Regional Action Groups is the development of local Digital Strategies in each Local Authority area. Indecon consultants have recently been appointed to assist Local Authorities in preparation of Digital Strategies over the coming months, to ensure that the benefits of infrastructure development under the National Broadband Plan are fully realised from an economic and social perspective.

Action Plan for Rural Development Funding

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he expects to be in a position to offer grant aid to rural communities involved in various projects to enhance rural life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8968/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Depart-

ment has been established 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.

The Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017. The Plan contains 276 actions for delivery across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other organisations to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland. The 2017 Action Plan allocated funding of €40.4 million to 40 measures put forward by Government Departments and agencies.

The Action Plan includes a range of measures to support rural communities, enhance local services and make rural Ireland a better place to live and work. In addition to the programmes run by my Department set out below, these actions contain a range of schemes to be delivered by other Departments and agencies which will empower local communities to develop their areas and improve their quality of life, such as the built heritage investment scheme, the GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings grant scheme, the Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, the Better Energy Homes Scheme, the Better Energy Communities Scheme, community crime prevention schemes and the Sports Capital Programme.

In Budget 2018, my Department secured in excess of €220 million giving us the foundation we need to drive both the rural and community agenda and to deliver initiatives that can foster growth right across the country.

My Department delivers a variety of schemes that provide support for the sustainable development of rural communities in line with commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development. These schemes and programmes include flagship programmes such as the LEADER and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation (SICAP) Programmes, the Community Services Programme, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR Programme, the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS), the Seniors Alert Scheme and the Communities Facilities Scheme.

My Department is also responsible for the overall administration of the Dormant Accounts Fund. The legislation governing Dormant Accounts provides the framework for the disbursement of funds to measures targeted at socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged people and people with a disability. Depending on their focus, these measures would be implemented in urban and rural areas all across the country.

All schemes are open to applications from relevant parties during the application timeframes set for each scheme or programme.

My Department will continue to work with key stakeholders including local authorities, community and voluntary groups, and dedicated agencies to support job creation, attract tourism investment and to contribute to sustainable economic development in rural Ireland. The Department will ensure that maximum use is obtained from the resources allocated and that value for money is delivered in respect of the 2018 schemes.

Further information on schemes and programmes, including the Action Plan for Rural Development, can be found on my Department's website www.drcd.gov.ie

The recent launch of the National Development Plan further highlights Government commitment to rural communities with the announcement of the new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund to be established under my Department's remit. The new fund will support my Department's key aims and objectives in providing additional resources to promote rural renewal in order to enable towns, villages and outlying rural areas to grow sustainably and to

support delivery of the strategic objectives of the National Planning Framework

Action Plan for Rural Development

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to further support enterprise and enhance employment across rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8969/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a range of measures which will support enterprise growth and job creation in rural areas. These measures will be delivered across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other organisations over the period to 2020.

The relevant measures in the Action Plan are aimed at:

- growing and attracting enterprises and jobs,
- supporting growth in specific sectors such as Agri-food, Tourism and Renewable Energy,
- ensuring rural communities have the necessary skills to meet the needs of the labour market, and
- supporting job seekers in rural areas.

The Government has set a target of supporting the delivery of 135,000 extra jobs outside of Dublin by 2020.

The latest labour market data published by the Central Statistics Office, for Quarter 3 2017, show that employment increased in almost all regions of the country year-on-year. All regions saw increases in IDA employment in 2017, with over 50% of the 19,851 new jobs created last year being located outside of Dublin. Two-thirds (65%) of the 19,332 new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland companies in 2017 were outside of Dublin.

My own Department also contributes to job creation in rural areas through programmes such the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Rural Recreation Scheme and LEADER. LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has a budget of €250 million over the period to 2020 and has a job creation target of 3,100 over the lifetime of the programme.

Leader Programmes Funding

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his future plans for the disbursement of funds through the Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8971/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Leader is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 which has a total budget of €250 million over the programming period. LEADER is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area.

€220 million of the available funding has already been allocated to the 28 Leader sub-regional areas throughout the country. The allocation for each sub-regional area 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.

Each LAG is responsible for deciding how their allocation is distributed to Leader projects over the duration of the programme, based on the objectives in their Local Development Strategies. The allocation also includes a provision to cover the running costs of the LAGs.

The balance of €30 million in funding which has not yet been allocated under Leader is available for schemes which will be selected at a national level based on submissions from the Local Action Groups. This includes a specific scheme to fund food projects which will be launched in the coming months, and funding to support LAGs that come together to jointly deliver a Leader project.

As of 16 February 2018, 738 projects with a value of €20.8 million had been approved for Leader funding by the LAGs and €996,656 in project payments had been made. A further 318 projects requesting over €16 million in funding are at various stages in the approval process. This funding will be drawn down as projects start to incur expenditure and submit payment claims.

I anticipate that there will be a significant increase in project expenditure over the course of 2018 based on the progress which has been made by the LAGs in approving projects in recent months. My Department has also introduced a number of administrative improvements to the Leader programme which will also assist LAGs and project promoters in their delivery of the programme.

Library Services

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress to date in respect of the public library strategy 2018 to 2022; his plans in this regard for the future to ensure a multi-functional library service as a centre for information, learning, local culture and community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8972/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The new Public Library Strategy 2018-2022 is being developed by my Department together with local authorities and the Local Government Management Agency.

The Strategy is expected to focus on three thematic programmes - Reading and Literacy Development, Learning and Information, and Community and Culture. These programmes will seek to build on progress under previous strategies and focus on strengthening relationships with local partners to develop public libraries as essential multi-functional facilities accessible to all.

The strategic programmes will be underpinned by six strategy enablers that reflect the elements to be developed under the Strategy. These include inter alia, new and redeveloped library buildings, improved ICT capacity and continued service and resource development.

An extensive consultation process has recently been completed. This included public focus groups with key users as well as workshops with library staff, elected members and senior managers of public libraries and local authorities. The process concluded with a broad public consultation on the strategic themes and priorities with more than 200 responses and submissions received by my Department.

The draft Strategy is well advanced and I expect to bring it to Government for approval in the coming weeks.

Telecommunications Services Provision

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he expects to be in a position to assist urban or rural communities directly by way of grant aid or indirectly through the improvement of telecommunications, with particular reference to the identification of particular blackspots in respect of broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8973/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the Government policy initiative which aims to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland. Policy responsibility for the NBP is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

However, my Department is working closely with the Minister's Department and with other key Departments and stakeholders to identify solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage problems around the country and to investigate how better services could be provided to consumers before the State broadband intervention commences under the NDP. This work builds on the recommendations of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce which published its report in December 2016. The Minister of State at my Department, Sean Kyne T.D., co-chairs with Minister Denis Naughten an Implementation Group to oversee the deliver of the Taskforce's recommendations.

Earlier today, Minister's Naughten and Kyne published the 2017 Annual Review on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce report.

The Annual Review outlines progress made in 2017 on actions aimed at accelerating the delivery of telecommunications infrastructure. Of the 40 actions identified by the Taskforce, 29 actions have been completed. Work remaining to be completed on 11 actions which will carry into the 2018 work programme. A further 23 new measures have been identified for delivery in 2018. The report can be accessed through the following link:

<http://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Implementation-Review-2017-PDF-with-cover.pdf>

As part of the delivery of the Taskforce's recommendations, my Department has co-funded the assignment of Broadband Officers in each of the 31 Local Authorities to act as the single point of contact for engagement with telecoms operators to assist with the rollout of broadband and mobile phone services. In addition, my Department is supporting Local Authorities with the development of local Digital Strategies and has appointed Indecon consultants to assist with this initiative.

A further initiative being supported by my Department is in relation to mobile phone blackspots. The aim of this pilot initiative is to identify problem areas in conjunction with Local Authorities and service providers, and utilise any infrastructure that could potentially be used to improve mobile coverage in these blackspot areas.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he plans to develop the town and village renewal scheme further in order to improve and enhance the standard of living communities for rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8974/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in 2016, with funding of €10 million allocated for that year. An enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme was announced in 2017, with an emphasis on projects that would have a sustainable and visible impact on towns or villages and their environs, and could demonstrate economic impact or potential.

In October 2017, I announced the allocation of €21.6 million to 281 projects in towns and villages across rural Ireland under the scheme.

Under Budget 2018, I have secured an allocation of €15 million for this year's Town and Village Renewal Scheme. I am planning to launch the 2018 scheme in the first half of the year and will again be placing an emphasis on projects that can demonstrate strong economic benefits for towns, villages and their environs.

In addition, a pilot scheme to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages is currently being developed as part of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The pilot will consider ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town centres can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purposes. This will help to rejuvenate town centres while also contributing to the housing needs of individuals.

Following initial discussions between my Department and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, I have now established a Steering Group to accelerate and oversee the design and delivery of the pilot scheme. The Steering Group is chaired by my Department, and involves a number of other key Departments and agencies, including the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance, and the County and City Management Association which provides representation from the Local Authority sector.

The first meeting of the Steering Group will take place shortly and I will be briefed on its progress on an on-going basis.

Carer's Allowance Payments

204. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears will issue in relation to a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8831/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

Once claims are in payment, the Department periodically reviews them to ensure that there is continued entitlement. Depending on the circumstances in each case and to make best use of resources, a review may only concentrate on a specific condition of entitlement.

Following a review of means, it was determined that the person in respect of whom CA was being paid, was entitled to an increase in payment. The person concerned was notified on 11 January 2018 of these details.

Arrears for the period 13 July 2017 to 17 January 2018 are expected to issue to the nominated bank account of the person concerned on 22 February 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

205. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a maximum rate of a pension has not been awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8835/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the records of my Department the person concerned has a social insurance record of 703 full rate insurance contributions and credits covering the period 1965 to the end of December 2014. The person concerned is in receipt of a reduced rate state pension (contributory) based on their assessed yearly average of 15 contributions. In arriving at this yearly average account was taken of the Homemaking periods of the person concerned.

In addition to the full rate insurance record, the person concerned has a modified insurance record and has an entitlement to a mixed insurance pro rata state pension (contributory). However the monetary value of this pension is lower than a pension based on full rate insurance and was therefore not awarded.

The person concerned is in receipt of the correct rate of contributory pension based on their social insurance record.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card Availability

206. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the locations of the offices in which the public services card may be applied for; her plans to expand the number of offices in which persons can apply for the card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8940/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are over 100 of the Department's offices nationally where customers can complete in-person registration to SAFE level 2. Details of the offices are provided in tabular form below.

SAFE level 2 is the minimum level for the issue of a Public Services Card as a physical token of authenticated identity. There is at least one SAFE location in every county and it would be the intention, in due course, that in-person SAFE registration would be available at all DEASP locations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

List of DEASP offices where in-person SAFE2 registration is available (February, 2018)

County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
Carlow	Intreo Centre Carlow	Kennedy Avenue, Carlow	(059) 9170170
-	Muine Bheag Branch Office	Regent Street, Muine-Bheag	(059) 9722940
-	Tullow Branch Office	Abbey Street, Tullow	(059) 9152500

County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
Cavan	Ballyconnell Branch Office	Unit 5 The Conall Building, Main Street, Ballyconnell	(049) 9527670
-	Intreo Centre Cavan	Dublin Road, Cavan	(049) 4331909
Clare	Intreo Centre Ennis	Kilrush Road, Ennis, County Clare	(065) 6867800
-	Ennistymon Branch Office	Bogbere, Ennistymon, Co. Clare	(065) 7072528
-	Kilrush Branch Office	Vandeleur Street, Kilrush, Co. Clare	(065) 9080030
Cork	Intreo Abbey Court House	Georges Quay (Cork City South of the River Lee and Ballincollig)	(021) 4943100
-	□Intreo Hanover Street	□Hanover Street (Cork City North of the River Lee, Blarney and Glanmire)	□(021) 4806800
-	Bandon Branch Office	96 North Main Street, Bandon Co. Cork	(023) 8820200
-	Bantry Branch Office	Bridge Street, Bantry, Co. Cork	(027) 20820
-	Clonakilty Branch Office	Unit 2, Supervalu Shopping Centre, Faxbridge, Clonakilty	(023) 8821210
-	Intreo Centre Cobh	Lynch's Quay, Cobh	(021) 4908010
-	Kinsale Branch Office	Market Lane, Kinsale	(021) 4702910
-	Mallow Branch Office	72 Off Main Street, Mallow	(022) 30934
-	Midleton Branch Office	Enterprise Park, Dwyer Road, Midleton, Cork	(021) 4621200
-	Newmarket Branch Office	Main Street, Newmarket	(029) 22110
-	Skibbereen Branch Office	Mardyke Street, Skibbereen; Co. Cork	(028) 40300
Donegal	Ballybofey Branch Office	Unit 1 Garvan Court, Main Street, Ballybofey, Co Donegal	(074) 9130490
-	Intreo Centre Buncrana	McCarter's Road, Ardaravan, Buncrana, Co. Donegal	(074) 9364600

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County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
-	PSC Centre <input type="checkbox"/> Donegal Town	<input type="checkbox"/> DSP, Public Services Centre, Donegal Town, Co. Donegal	<input type="checkbox"/> (074) 9740070
-	Intreo Centre Dunfaghagh	Main Street, Dunfaghagh, Co Donegal	(074) 9136750
-	Intreo Centre Dungloe	Public Service Centre, Gweedore Road, Dungloe, Co Donegal	(074) 9561030
-	Letterkenny LO	High Road, Letterkenny, Co Donegal	(074) 9160460
Dublin	Intreo Centre Balbriggan	<input type="checkbox"/> Gallens Mill, Mill Street, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin	<input type="checkbox"/> (01) 6984300
-	Intreo Centre Ballyfermot	Rossmore Ave, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10	(01) 6160300
-	Intreo Centre Ballymun	Main Street, Ballymun, Dublin 9	(01) 8940000
-	Intreo Centre Bishop Square	Redmonds Hill, Dublin 2	(01) 4763500
-	Intreo Centre Blanchardstown	Westend House, Snugborough Road Extension, Dublin 15	(01) 8581300
-	<input type="checkbox"/> Intreo Centre Clondalkin	<input type="checkbox"/> 9th Lock Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22	<input type="checkbox"/> (01) 4030000
-	Intreo Centre Coock	Northside Civic Centre, Bunratty Road, Dublin 17	(01) 6125400
-	Intreo Centre Cork Street	Guild Building, Cork Street, Dublin 8	(01) 8526700
-	D'Olier House PSC Centre	<input type="checkbox"/> D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2	<input type="checkbox"/> (01) 7040520
-	Intreo Centre Dun Laoghaire	18-21 Cumberland Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin	(01) 2145540
-	Intreo Centre Finglas	Mellowes Road, Finglas, Dublin 11	(01) 8581100
-	Intreo Centre Kilbarrack	Greendale Shopping Centre, Kilbarrack, Dublin 5	(01) 8063830
-	Intreo Centre Parnell Street	197/199 Parnell Street, Dublin 1	(01) 8899500

County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
-	Intreo Centre Navan Road	Navan Road, Dublin 7	(01) 8823100
-	□Intreo Centre Nutgrove	□Nutgrove Shopping Centre, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14	□(01) 6732000
-	Intreo Centre Tallaght	The Square, Tallaght, Dublin 24	(01) 4629400
-	Tallaght PSC Centre	Unit 247, Level 2, The Square Shopping Centre, Tallaght, Dublin 24	(01) 4629496
-	Intreo Centre Swords	Mainscourt, 23 Main Street, Swords, Co. Dublin. □	(01) 4164190□
Galway	□Ballinasloe Branch Office	□Unit 1-2, River-view, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway	□(090) 9631800
-	Intreo Centre Clifden	Galway Road, Clifden, Co Galway	(095) 22210
-	Intreo Centre Galway	Intreo Centre Galway, Sean Duggan Centre, Fairgreen, Galway	(091) 500800
-	Gort Branch Office	Loughrea Road, Gort, Co Galway	(091) 630210
-	Intreo Centre Loughrea	Railway House, Station Road, Loughrea, Co Galway	(091) 576870
-	Tuam Branch Office	Church View, Tuam, Co Galway	(093) 70940
Kerry	Intreo Centre Cahirciveen	St. Brendans Terrace, Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry	(066) 9473440
-	Intreo Centre Kenmare	Bridge Street, Kenmare, Co. Kerry	(064) 6640050
-	Intreo Centre Killarney	Park Court, Beech Road, Killarney, Co. Kerry	(064) 6678500
-	Intreo Centre Listowel	The Square, Listowel, Co. Kerry	(068) 50030
-	Intreo Centre Tralee	Godfrey Place, Tralee, Co. Kerry	(066) 7149500
Kildare	Athy Branch Office	Leinster Street, Athy, Kildare	(059) 8640250
-	Intreo Centre Newbridge	Moorefield Road, Newbridge, Co. Kildare	(045) 491500

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County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
Kilkenny	Intreo Centre Kilkenny	Government Buildings, Hebron Road, Kilkenny	(056) 7715100
Laois	Portlaoise Branch Office	Church Street, Portlaoise, Co Laois	(057) 8678010
Leitrim	Intreo Centre Carrick-on-Shannon	Leitrim Road, Carrick-On-Shannon	(071) 9650070
-	□ Intreo Centre Manorhamilton	□ Sligo Road, Manorhamilton	(071)-9820030
Limerick	Kilmallock Branch Office	Charleville Road, Kilmallock	(063) 20900
-	Intreo Centre Limerick	Dominick Street, Limerick	(061) 212200
-	Intreo Centre Newcastlewest	Gortboy, Newcastle West	(069) 24600
-	Pery Court PSC Centre □	□ Pery Court, Upper Mallow Street, Limerick	□ (061) 436050
Longford	Intreo Centre Longford	Government Buildings, Ballinalee Road, Longford	(043) 3340000
Louth	Intreo Centre Drogheda	Custom House Quay, Drogheda, Co Louth	(041) 9871130
-	Intreo Centre Dundalk	Government Buildings, Saint Alphon-sus Road, Dundalk, Co Louth	(042) 9392600
Mayo	Intreo Centre Achill	Achill Sound, Co Mayo	(098) 45050
-	Intreo Centre Ballina	Government Buildings, Ballina, Co Mayo	(096) 80500
-	Intreo Centre Belmullet	American Street, Belmullet, Co Mayo	(097) 81029
-	Intreo Centre Castlebar	Micheal Davitt House, Castlebar, Co Mayo	(094) 9063700
-	Intreo Centre Westport	James Street, Westport, Co Mayo	(098) 53800
Meath	Kells Branch Office	Bective Square, Kells, Co. Meath	(046) 9280490
-	Intreo Centre Navan	Kennedy House, Kennedy Road, Navan	(046) 9037900
-	Trim Branch Office	Haggard Street, Trim, Co. Meath	(046) 9481040

County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
Monaghan	Monaghan PSC Centre	Floor 1, Teach O'Cleircin, Old Cross Square, Monaghan, Co. Monaghan	(042) 6823543
Offaly	☐ Birr Branch Office	☐ Green Street, Birr, Co. Offaly	☐ (057) 9169040
-	Intreo Centre Tullamore	Castle Buildings, Tara Street, Tullamore, Co Offaly	(057) 9318500
Roscommon	Boyle Branch Office	Elphin Street, Boyle, Co. Roscommon	(071) 9664033
-	Castlerea Branch Office	Main Street, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon	(094) 9625510
-	Roscommon PSC Centre	Government Buildings, Convent Road, Roscommon	(090) 6632980
Sligo	Intreo Centre Sligo	Government Offices, Cranmore Road, Sligo	(071) 9148200
-	☐ Tubbercurry Branch Office	☐ Humbert Street, Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo	☐ (071) 9138633
Tipperary	☐ Cahir Branch Office	☐ Market Yard, The Square, Cahir, Co. Tipperary	☐ (052) 7445200
-	Carrick-on-Suir Branch Office	55 New Street, Carrick-On-Suir Tipperary South	(051) 601190
-	Intreo Centre Clonmel	Harbour House, New Quay, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary	(052) 6170220
-	Nenagh Branch Office	Church View, Nenagh, Tipperary North	(067) 50902
-	Intreo Centre Thurles	Stradavoher, Thurles, Co. Tipperary	(0504) 25900
-	Tipperary Town Branch Office	8 Church Street, Tipperary	(062) 80230
Waterford	Intreo Centre Waterford	Government Buildings, Cork Street, Waterford	(051) 356000
Westmeath	Intreo Centre Athlone	Government Offices, Grace Park Road, Athlone, Co. Westmeath	(090) 6449600

County	Branch	Address	Phone Number
-	Intreo Centre Mullingar	Blackhall Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath	(076) 6285100
Wexford	Intreo Centre Wexford	Anne Street, Wexford	(053) 9165400
Wicklow	Intreo Centre Arklow	Castle Park, Arlow, Co Wicklow	(0402) 20420
-	Intreo Centre Bray	Civic Offices, Main Street, Bray, County Wicklow	(01) 2117937
-	Wicklow PSC Centre Murrough	Government Buildings, The Murrough, Wicklow Town Co. Wicklow	(0404) 20400

Exceptional Needs Payment Data

207. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 618 of 30 January 2018, the number of ENP applications made in each county; the number that were refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8954/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Department may make an urgent needs payment (UNP) to a person who may not normally qualify for SWA but who have an urgent need which they cannot meet from their own resources or an alternative is not available at that time. The Government has provided over €36.4 million for ENPs and UNPs in 2018.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the ENP and UNP schemes, however they are not maintained on the number of applications or the outcome of those applications. There were over 103,000 ENPs and UNPs issued under the scheme in 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9006/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 23 August 2017. The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and this lady was notified in writing of this decision on 23 October 2017. She was also notified the reason for it and of the option to submit further medical evidence in support of her application for review and of her right to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals

Office (SWAO).

To date no request for an appeal or review has been received from this lady.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

209. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to bring forward a pension scheme for community employment supervisors. [9017/18]

210. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to implement a Labour Court recommendation (details supplied) which sought to provide a redundancy payment deal for community employment workers and those formerly employed through FÁS. [9018/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 210 together.

Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector. The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for such employees even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. It is open to individuals to make provision for a pension by way of PRSA which all employers are obliged to facilitate.

However, it should be noted that the issue of CE supervisors' pension provision is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department is represented on this group, as are the unions, Pobal and other relevant Government Departments.

The Forum last met on 23 November 2017 and I understand that a paper outlining the costs involved was presented. Following on from this, I understand a meeting is being arranged in the coming weeks between the unions and my colleague, Paschal Donoghue T.D., Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

If circumstances arise where a CE supervisor is made redundant by their employer (the sponsoring organisation), and qualifies for a payment under the Redundancy Payments Acts 1967-2007, the supervisor would be entitled to statutory redundancy at a rate of two weeks' pay per year of service, plus a further week's pay (subject to an earnings limit of €600.00 per week).

My Department (and previously FÁS) have consistently maintained that the only circumstances in which it will fund enhanced redundancy packages to CE supervisors is where the redundancy arises because of the actions of the Department due to restructuring of the CE programme e.g. mainstreaming schools-based CE schemes to the Department of Education in 2001 or the reduction in the overall numbers on CE, such as happened in the late 1990s/early 2000s due to reduced numbers of long-term unemployed on the Live Register. Enhanced redundancy packages under the above circumstances were only funded by FÁS/DEASP where the sponsor/employer did not have the ability to fund the enhanced package.

This does not apply where the employer is the instigator of the redundancy e.g. no longer wanting to run the CE scheme, closure due to Company Registration Office strike-off, or where the sponsor organisation does not comply with the terms of their contract (maintain participant

numbers etc.) and it is necessary for the Department to discontinue funding for the scheme/supervisor/assistant supervisor positions.

My Department has not made a decision to reduce the overall number of CE places or to mainstream CE places in the case of any CE scheme closures in recent times. Therefore, in these circumstances, there is no liability on my Department to pay enhanced redundancy.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Foreshore Issues

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a matter will be addressed regarding the purchase of land in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8945/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The persons named have made an offer to purchase an area of reclaimed foreshore occupied by them for many years without consent. However, my Department has informed them that the nature of the offer made could not be recommended for approval by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Development Contributions

212. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that remain non-compliant with the 2013 development contribution guidelines in relation to taskforce action number 8 and the progress report of the taskforce implementation group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9012/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Development contributions applied by local authorities are levied on the basis of a development contribution scheme adopted by the elected members which sets out how contributions are to be applied in respect of developments in their respective functional areas. The level of contribution and the types of development to which development contributions should apply, including any exemptions from charging in specific circumstances if that is deemed appropriate, are therefore determined at local authority level, in accordance with the powers vested in elected members in this regard.

For the purpose of supporting and incentivising economic development, including the roll-out of broadband infrastructure, my Department issued statutory guidelines to planning authorities in January 2013 under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act on the implementation of development contribution schemes to which planning authorities are required to have regard in the performance of their planning functions. For the purpose of ensuring consistency in the adoption and implementation of development contribution schemes by local authorities, the guidelines recommended that all local authorities should include a specific waiver for broadband infrastructure (e.g. masts and antennae) in their schemes.

Most development contribution schemes adopted by planning authorities currently provide for such waivers. In this regard, 23 local authorities have adopted schemes which include a full exemption for broadband infrastructure. Six local authorities do not specify a waiver for such infrastructure in their current schemes; however, as there is no provision included in their current schemes to charge for telecommunications infrastructure generally, the practice adopted is

not to do so.

My Department has been engaging with the remaining two local authorities regarding the incorporation of explicit waivers in their schemes. Both local authorities have since prepared draft schemes that incorporate waivers for broadband infrastructure, which are currently out for public consultation. Notwithstanding the fact that the adoption of these schemes is a reserved function of the locally elected members, I anticipate that these schemes as finally adopted will comply with the 2013 guidelines in this regard.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

213. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 768 of 6 February 2018, the work in his Department to deal with the problem of residents that live in an end of terrace home in which the private sewage line for a group of houses ends and such residents are continually faced with the problem and expense of having blockages in the line dealt with; if the attention has been drawn to the burden the lack of legislation in this area places upon such persons, the tensions this causes between neighbours and the frequent public health risks that arise in circumstances in which disputes arise; the grants available to persons to deal with such expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8907/18]

216. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the powers available to State bodies to take enforcement action against a person that fails to take steps to resolve a sewage leak emanating from their property onto a public footpath or roadway; the State bodies that have such enforcement powers; the specific legal provisions under which enforcement action can be taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9008/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 216 together.

The Water Services Act of 2007 sets down the obligations and responsibilities of water services authorities and property owners in respect of wastewater infrastructure. Section 70 places a general duty of care on the owner or occupier of a premises to ensure that wastewater from the premises does not cause nuisance or risk to human health or the environment and to refrain from putting anything into a drainage system that would block or damage it. It also provides a means of redress through the courts for a water services authority (i.e. a county or city council with a statutory function in relation to water services and, pursuant to section 7 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, Irish Water) or any person affected by a breach of duty of care by a third party.

Section 8 of the Act of 2007 gives a water services authority the power to prosecute offences under the Act, including an offence under section 70.

While the legal position is set out in the Act of 2007, I recognise the importance of local authorities and Irish Water working together in setting out clearly the responsibilities of Irish Water and property owners in relation to water supply and waste water infrastructure. My Department is engaging with Irish Water and local authorities in this regard.

214. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the income levels to qualify for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8944/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, prescribe maximum net income limits for eligibility for social housing support for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy, published by my Department.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band are based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing support has commenced and will be finalised later this year.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

215. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the calculation of net disposable income works in relation to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan; the living expense allowances that apply, for example, in respect of a couple for food, heat and other essential living expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8978/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, a new loan offering - the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan - was introduced on 1 February 2018.

Rather than applying a Loan to Income (LTI) limit to the new loan, a maximum permissible Net Disposable Income (NDI) ratio of 35% is used which more accurately reflects the benefits of the low fixed rate available for the full term of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

The calculation for NDI is based upon after tax allowable income percentages, taking account also of the Universal Social Charge. An applicant's NDI ratio is calculated from the annual repayments on all loans, including the current application, and any maintenance payments, as a % of their Net Disposable Income. The maximum ratio permitted is 35%. This means that loan repayments in total cannot exceed 35% of a borrower's after tax monthly income.

Question No. 216 answered with Question No. 213.

Gorse Burning

217. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position in relation to extending the spring gorse burning season; if the season for controlled burning in low risk areas beyond 1 March 2018 will be extended in view of adverse weather conditions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8900/18]

21 February 2018

218. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a person can apply for an extension to the hedge cutting period at the end of February 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8930/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August.

Following a review of Section 40, which involved, inter alia, consideration of submissions from interested parties, proposals were announced in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two year basis. The legislation required to allow for these pilot measures is included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was published in January 2016.

The Bill has completed its passage through Seanad Éireann and has completed Second Stage in Dail Éireann. A date for Committee Stage in the Dail is awaited.

In the meantime, the existing provisions relating to Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts remain in force.