

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Early Years Sector

13. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the engagement she has had with representatives of the early child care sector since budget 2018 was announced. [9001/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Strong engagement with the early years sector has been a hallmark of my time as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I have travelled throughout the country to meet childcare providers within their own services, to meet City and County Childcare Committees and to speak first hand to childcare providers, parents and to children.

On becoming Minister I established the National Early Years Forum, at which issues arising in the sector can be raised and discussed face to face. This helps better communication and engagement and fosters improved policy and decision making. The Early Years Forum consists of representatives of childcare providers and staff, academic experts in early years care and education and advocacy groups from across the sector. The Forum met before and after Budget 2018 and is due to meet again on March 7th.

The introduction of measures last September to make childcare more affordable were preceded by a national road show of information sessions. These events were attended by more than 1,000 childcare practitioners and offered information to the sector, as well as providing an opportunity for feedback to my Department. I intend to arrange similar events again in the future.

Focused working groups, made up of representatives from the early years sector, are a regular feature of my Department's work. Notably, the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme is being informed by both a Business and Systems Working Group and a Communications Consultative Group. Both groups have met on numerous occasions to discuss aspects of how the scheme will operate when launched and offer the sector an opportunity to shape the scheme's design and its roll-out.

I have met with representatives of most, if not all, of the national childcare representative bodies in the country to hear first hand the issues they are experiencing and their proposals for improvement. I also established and have met with an Expert Group tasked with reporting on the future of child-minding in Ireland.

Childcare providers are represented on my Department's Steering Group for the implementation of the Access and Inclusion Model, or AIM as it is known, which supports children with disabilities in the ECCE scheme and the early years service they attend.

I am delighted that my Departmental childcare team has been strengthened by the secondment of four staff from various childcare organisations around the country to assist us with our work. The expertise and experience of these staff complements the work of officials in considering policy and operational matters.

A plan to address the communications needs associated with the forthcoming Affordable Childcare Scheme has been finalised and work is underway for similar strategies to be developed for the Early Years Division of my department. This demonstrates my ongoing commitment to engagement and communication with the early years sector.

### **Child Care Services**

14. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the recently established working group tasked with streamlining children's mental health services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8826/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am pleased to say that the Working Group referred to by the Deputy held its inaugural meeting on 19th January 2018. The group is co-chaired by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health. The group is made up of senior officials from both Departments with representatives from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and the Health Service Executive.

The key objective of the working group is to examine psychological and mental health services for children and young people with the aim of agreeing a clear continuum of provision and strengthening alignment between providers. The services must be centered on the needs of children and young people. The working group have agreed the Terms of Reference and are focusing on assessing work and policies in place with a view to identifying key actions to be progressed and improvements to be made.

I want to ensure that we have an integrated and comprehensive model of service for children and young people. At present, Tusla has responsibility for services relating to the psychological welfare of children and their families but the HSE deals with the more acute services. These include children and young people with complex developmental issues and those with more severe mental health problems.

The division of responsibility between Tusla and the HSE for different types of psychological and mental health services brings challenges, which both agencies have been trying to address. Tusla funds the HSE for the provision of some community based psychological services but the availability of services between areas is quite variable.

Both Tusla and the HSE have been developing proposals to improve the provision and availability of services but we would all accept that there is a good deal more work to do to achieve a well coordinated integrated service that meets the needs of children and young people.

I have met with the Ministers for Health and relevant Ministers of State with a view to maximising collaboration between Tusla and the HSE, including in the area of mental health.

I am pleased that the working group has now commenced its work to address these and related matters. Our aim is that the group would finalise an agreed approach by the middle of this

year and commence implementation from Quarter 3 onwards.

### **Child Detention Centres**

15. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the response she received from Tusla in relation to the failure of an organisation to acknowledge child protection complaints from the designated liaison person at Oberstown youth detention campus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8927/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** HIQA undertook an inspection of Oberstown Children Detention Campus in March 2017. The Deputy is referring to a statement in the Report of the finding of that inspection. This stated that there were three formal reports to Tusla for which no acknowledgements were received.

I am advised that the reports referred to were sent to Tusla in accordance with procedures in existence at the time. Acknowledgments were not routinely issued to all reports. Prior to the HIQA inspection of Oberstown at which this matter was raised, Oberstown management met with Tusla management to discuss the issue of a protocol setting out how both agencies will work together on a range of issues. This included the procedures for reporting child protection and welfare concerns to Tusla. I am advised that there are ongoing discussions with management at Oberstown and Tusla regarding this protocol.

While the draft protocol includes procedures in relation to reporting child protection and welfare concerns, it is important to note that procedures have changed since December 11th 2017 when I commenced the Children first Act 2015. It is now the case that mandated reporters are required to make their reports in writing. They also have a legal entitlement to an acknowledgement. Tusla has an online portal in place for the receipt of mandated reports.

Mandated reporters can register on the Tusla website and are then in a position to submit reports directly to Tusla via the portal. The portal is an efficient and accessible way of ensuring that reports of child abuse can be generated as efficiently as possible, including all the relevant information, and can be sent without delay to Tusla.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

16. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the rationale behind a group (details supplied) not being invited to participate on the newly formed forum in view of their unique experience within mother and baby homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8869/18]

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

For the avoidance of any confusion, I would like to clarify that no invitations have issued to participate in the Forum itself.

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 to assist in this process.

The Deputy may wish to note that the umbrella organisation to which the Association of Mixed Race Irish are associated has been invited to participate in this selection process.

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

Furthermore, officials from my Department were in contact with representatives of the Association of Mixed Race Irish last week to clarify the arrangements being made in relation to the Forum. My officials have assured the organisation that its members will be able to seek representation on the Forum in due course.

My Department will facilitate a comprehensive advertising campaign so that interested parties are made aware of the relevant details. This is an opportunity for former residents to create and drive forward a process that they can support and trust and actively participate in developing actions and solutions to address their concerns.

I strongly encourage all interested parties to participate in this process.

### **Children's Rights**

17. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a report (details supplied); if she is satisfied that the measures she has taken to address the problems facing children here are working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9000/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Deputy will be aware that the Report Card is an established accountability tool for the Children's Right Alliance (CRA) and its more than 100 member organisations. It has since 2009, used the Report Card to scrutinise progress on the commitments to children in the Programme for Government. The most recent Report Card explores progress during 2017 against commitments in the Programme for Government which was published in May 2016.

Each year, the CRA evaluates Government's delivery of its promises in six key areas - the right to education, to an adequate standard of living, to health, rights in the family environment and alternative care, rights in early childhood and the right to equality. The grading is carried out by a high-level independent panel, comprising some of Ireland's leading experts in children's rights, child law, education, early years and from the trade union sector. The Report Card also provides an important resource for politicians, policy makers, service providers and non-governmental organisations and academics. The recommendations relate to issues across a range of Government Departments, including my Department.

I note that the Government's overall performance on child-related issues was assessed to have improved over last year, and that five of the six areas had an overall improvement in grade. My own Department's area of child protection got the single highest grade of the whole report; a B, up from last year's grade C. The report also gave LGBT+ issues a grade B-, up from

C+ last year.

Nevertheless I recognise that there is much to be done, both within my own Department's areas of responsibility and across Government.

A considerable number of the CRA's recommendations are reflected in the commitments contained within Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, with responsibility for implementation again falling to the respective Government Departments. My Department is responsible for monitoring progress on the implementation of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures and supporting its key implementation structures across Departments and sectors. An annual report on progress towards those commitments to April 2017 was published in September 2017.

I can confirm that my officials are already focussing on the immediate actions for 2018 that were highlighted by the CRA in relation to these policy areas.

### **Dormant Accounts Fund Grants**

18. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the allocation her Department received from the Dormant Accounts Fund of €7 million for an initiative aimed at breaking the cycle of childhood poverty; the amount that has been spent to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8866/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department has received funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund for the development and implementation of the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI). This initiative which is envisaged to run until 2020 aims to ensure the mainstreaming of learning from the original Area-Based Childhood and similar programmes in prevention and early intervention. The QCBI will harness and apply this learning across the relevant services and supports with the aim of achieving wider systems change and service improvements for children and young people.

It is both an ambitious and significant initiative and one which through consultation with key informants is seen as both necessary and impactful. The QCBI has undergone a significant design and consultation phase. Indeed this was necessary based on its scope and potential impact.

To date, approximately €232,000 has been drawn down from the Dormant Accounts fund for preparatory work during the design phase of the QCBI. The breakdown of payments made to date are attached.

Now that the initiative is advancing apace, a significant suite of projects and associated expenditure under the QCBI initiative will be advanced in the coming weeks. These include the development of a Knowledge Exchange Platform, the launch of an Innovation Fund, and the development of a training module on prevention and early intervention.

These are key measures which will actively and directly support services to ensure that they have benefit from the learning gleaned in terms of service and practice impact. This will ensure that wider structures and supports for children and young people offer the best responses in enhancing their outcomes.

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Date	QCBI -Spend to date	Payee	€
March 2016	EU Peer Review on Prevention and Early Intervention to improve outcomes for Children, young people and their families.	Cleaver East	3,630
March & July 2016	Data Hub Development Research	Research Matters	20,830
March 2016	Interest on payment	Research Matters	103
March 2016	ABC Mentoring Workshop	Clarion Hotel	5876
December 2016 & May 2017	Landscape Analysis for QCBI- was commissioned to map relevant initiatives that were relevant for the development of QCBI with a view to harnessing and building on those initiatives.	Brian Harvey Social Research	22,140
January 2017	QCBI Professional advice and input	Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative	20,000

Date	QCBI -Spend to date	Payee	€
April, September and December 2017	‘Outcomes for Children Information and Data Hub Project’ seeks to develop a resource that presents local data related to children and services provided for them. The project that is implemented by Tusla includes the development a digital resources as well as training that will enhance data-driven planning for, and delivery of, children’s services at local level. As such, it will help to address an important deficit. Tusla’s responsibility for planning of children’s services combined with their operational oversight of Children and Young People’s Services Committees positions them well to lead on this initiative.	TUSLA	159,000
	Total		231,579

### Early Childhood Care and Education

19. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a full list of eligible and ineligible costs for applications under the grants funding available to child care facilities for early year and school age childcare will be issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8864/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On 1st February 2018, I announced detailed application guidelines for the 2018 Early Years and School Age Capital programmes, including details on each of the five funding strands available under these.

Lists of indicative eligible and ineligible costs under each funding strand were made available as part of the application guidelines. For example, under Strands 1 and 4, dedicated to the creation of new childcare places under Early Years and School Age childcare respectively, alteration or refurbishment works undertaken on an existing facility to provide extra places would be an eligible cost; salary costs or general office equipment would not.

Under Early Years Strand 3, in which the focus is on the creation of a new, natural outdoor play area, eligible costs include reflective pools, natural planting and canvas canopies; whereas rubber matting and permanent construction projects are ineligible. In particular, I would advise that any application under this strand of funding will be appraised in terms of its overall vision, and how it aligns with the natural outdoor play area objective.

The indicative lists of eligible and ineligible costs, to be found in full in the application guidelines document, should be useful for prospective applicants. That being said, each project by its very nature is unique and so it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list. I would urge any providers who remain unsure to contact their local City/County Childcare Committee (CCC) or Pobal to assist them with any further questions about eligibility or otherwise.

I can assure you that each application for capital funding will be assessed on its own merits, and that the published guidelines exist in order to maximise the quality of applications received by my Department and Pobal before the application window closes at 3pm on Friday the 9th March 2018.

I anticipate that this year's Capital programmes will see great demand and competition for funding, and I wish all providers the very best of luck with any applications they might make. Their personal visions for the expansion and improvement of childcare services are an invaluable part of making Ireland's childcare sector into one which is world class, accessible and affordable to all.

### **Family Resource Centres**

20. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department will accept an application for a resource centre at a site (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8865/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Following recent clarification with the Deputy's office, I understand that the Deputy is querying if the organisation referred to, has applied to join the Family Resource Centre Programme.

On Budget Day, I was pleased to announce that additional resources of almost €3.0m were secured to support the inclusion of an additional 11 community organisations to the Family resource Centre Programme in 2018 and to support existing centres.

Tusla administers the Family Resource Centre Programme, and opened applications to the programme on 23rd October, 2017. The final deadline for receipt of these applications was 20th December, 2017.

Tusla has advised that it has received a joint application which includes the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

Tusla is currently reviewing all applications that were received within the specified application period. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the assessment in March 2018.

Family support is a priority for me, and the increased level of funding for Family Resource Centres in 2018 reflects this. I will continue to support Tusla in its work with Family Resource Centres around the country.

### **Family Support Services**

21. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to support stay at home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8867/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs I have responsibility for Early Years Care and Education and School Age Childcare. I am committed to the provision of childcare options that respect both parental choice and international evidence on how to achieve the best outcomes for children. Stay at home parents can access a number of schemes operated by my Department.

From September 2018, the ECCE Programme, or the Free Preschool Scheme as it is known by some, will be available to all children over the age of two years and eight months for two full programme years. 114,000 children are expected to participate in this Programme from September 2018, including children of stay at home parents. This is an increase in entitlement from 38 weeks when the scheme was introduced initially, to the 61 week average that was provided last year.

Other schemes provided by my Department address childcare affordability and are available to stay at home parents; for example, the universal subsidy for parents of children under three which was introduced last September. The Affordable Childcare Scheme when introduced will subsidise the cost of early years care and education and school age childcare. Parents who are not engaged in employment or study will be able to access subsidised childcare under the scheme for 15 hours per week. Deputies may be aware that the legislation for this scheme passed second stage in recent weeks.

Across Government, there have been a number of measures to support stay at home parents. Additional support has been provided for parents who choose to care for their children at home by increasing the Home Carer Tax Credit to €1,200 per year in Budget 2018.

State provision for maternity leave, parental leave and the recently introduced paternity leave also demonstrate the Government's commitment to support parents to care for young children. The Programme for Government commits to extending paid leave for parents in the first year of a child's life, which will be a key financial support enabling parents to care for their children at home in the critical first year. An Inter-Departmental group has been established to progress this commitment which officials from my Department are contributing to.

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. The National Early Years Strategy will focus on the period of early childhood, from birth to age five, and will cover all aspects of children's lives. Drafting of the strategy is underway and is being directly informed by research, expert advice and consultation inputs, as well as bilateral discussions with government departments.

The strategy will take a joined-up, cross-government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years. Development of the Strategy is a priority for me and for my Department, and I will move to publish the Strategy later this year.

### **Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation**

22. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8863/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The develop-

ment of the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) entails a programme of work encompassing legislative, ICT, governance, administrative and communications work-streams. Significant progress continues to be made across all these areas.

Of particular significance, the Childcare Support Bill was published in December 2017 and completed Second Stage in the Dáil on 31st January. A Request for Tender for the development of the Scheme's ICT system was also published on 31st January, with tenders due to be submitted by 26th March.

Other preparations in relation to governance, administration and communications for the ACS are progressing as follows:

- a contract has been awarded to provide expertise in the development of a robust Governance and Compliance Framework for the ACS and work is underway;
- data-sharing arrangements with the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Employment and Social Protection are advancing on schedule;
- a Data Protection Strategy has been developed, following a Data Privacy Impact Assessment and liaison with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner;
- An ACS Communications and Engagement Strategy has been approved to ensure that parents, providers and others who need to know about the scheme will do so;
- Standard Operating Procedures and proposals for Scheme Administrator staffing and structures are also under development; and
- An Independent Review into the Cost of Delivery of Quality Childcare is underway.

The timescale for the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme is dependent on the development of the ICT system. Accordingly, until such time as an ICT vendor is in place to build the system, and agrees a delivery timeframe, it is not possible to confirm and communicate a definitive start date for the scheme.

However, the existing childcare schemes and supports, including the enhancements introduced last September, will remain in place for the childcare programme year which begins this September (2018). The vast majority of those eligible for support under the Affordable Childcare Scheme, and the initial income thresholds agreed for its introduction, are currently receiving financial support on par with what they will receive when ACS launches. Over 67,000 (96% of the estimated eligible children) are availing of these enhanced supports and the number increases week on week. This includes the families of 32,000 children who are receiving the benefit of the new universal subsidy (97% of the estimated uptake).

Finally, in recognition of the administrative role which childcare services play in delivering Government schemes and other non-contact work, €18m in funding was paid to services in 2017 and will remain in place for 2018.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason for establishing a consultation forum; the guidance she received with regard to her view that a membership of 20 is appropriate; the methodology that will be employed to select membership; if it will be inclusive of all survivor groups, including a group (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8883/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** 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 of mother and baby homes and their advocates.

These consultations were facilitated by Mr Jim Halley and he further assisted me in developing the proposal for a Collaborative Forum capable of responding to the issues raised by former residents. Mr Halley is a past Chairman of the Chartered Institute of Arbitration and he is an internationally respected mediator and facilitator.

I believe that the establishment of this innovative collaborative process will enable stakeholders to create and drive forward a process that they can support and trust. The fundamental principle behind the proposal is that those affected by a decision have the right to be centrally involved in the decision making process.

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 size and membership of the Forum will appropriately reflect its focus to directly support and engage with those who were resident for a time in these institutions and those with comparable experiences in the former County Homes.

I am in the process of setting up a Selection Panel to oversee the independent selection of representatives to the Forum. 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 to assist in this process.

In selecting members to the Forum, the panel will be obliged to have regard to relevant considerations to ensure a balance and diversity of stakeholder perspectives and experiences is achieved. The Panel will agree the criteria for selection and the arrangements for a public information campaign to seek expressions of interest from relevant persons.

The Deputy may wish to note that the umbrella organisation to which she refers has been invited to participate in the selection process and its members can respond to the call for expressions of interest in due course.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

24. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social workers in each region; the number of social worker vacancies in each region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8829/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla has advised that the breakdown of whole time equivalent Social Workers by region as at 31 December, 2017 is as follows:

Region/Area	WTE
Child Residential Service	8.6

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Region/Area	WTE
Residential DML	1.99
Residential DNE	2.89
Residential West	
Residential South	3.72
Special Care Services	
National Services	98.04
Dublin Mid-Leinster (DML)	374.78
Dublin South Central	75.06
Dublin Sth East\Wicklow	99.52
Dublin Sth West\Kildare West Wicklow	99.59
Midland	78.62
Regional Services DML	21.99
Dublin North East (DNE)	301.46
Cavan\Monaghan	34.45
Dublin North City	92.66
Louth\Meath	74.88
North Dublin	71.13
Regional Services DNE	28.34
South	344.32
Carlow\Kilkenny\Sth Tipperary	63.24
Cork	152.36
Kerry	40.35
Regional Services South	3.98
Waterford\Wexford	84.39
West	338.78
Donegal	63.66
Galway\Roscommon	92.08
Mayo	37.01
Mid-West	107.02
Regional Services West	1
Sligo\Leitrim	38.01
Grand Total	1465.98

Tusla has advised that there are currently 282 vacancies for Social Workers. The numerical breakdown of these vacancies by region is as follows:

Dublin South	61
Dublin West	57
Dublin North East (DNE)	89
Dublin Mid-Leinster (DML)	70
Residential	1
National Service	4
Grand Total	282

Recruitment and retention of social workers continues to be a challenge for Tusla however, I understand that 75 of these 282 vacant posts are at an advance stage of the recruitment process and Tusla expects to fill them shortly.

Dublin South	17
Dublin West	22
Dublin North East (DNE)	19
Dublin Mid-Leinster(DML)	17
Grand Total	75

Tusla is currently drafting its 3-Year multiannual strategic workforce plan and I expect that this will consider initiatives to address the on-going challenges of recruiting social workers.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

25. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to advertise the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation in the United States of America in view of the acknowledgement of 2,000 children that went to the United States for adoption between the 1940s and 1970s (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8868/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The statutory Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters) is independent in the conduct of its investigations. The approach to publicising its work and seeking persons with potentially relevant information to come forward are matters for the Commission to decide. I do not have any role or influence in this regard.

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

As the Deputy will also be aware, issues relating to the experiences of mothers and children in these institutions, and the on-going investigations of the Commission, continue to be widely reported by national and international media outlets.

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

### **Family Resource Centres**

26. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the process to allocate 11 new family resource centres around the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8980/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** On Budget Day, I was pleased to announce that additional resources of almost €3.0m were secured to support the work of existing Family Resource Centres, and to facilitate the inclusion of an additional 11 community organisations to the Family Resource Centre Programme.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers the Family Resource Centre Programme.

Applications to the programme opened on 23rd October 2017, and the final deadline for re-

ceipt of these applications was 20th December 2017. Tusla has confirmed that it has received a total of 43 applications.

Tusla is currently assessing all applications, and applicants will be notified of the outcome of the assessment in March 2018.

### **Homeless Persons Supports**

27. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the findings of an organisation’s (details supplied) report, in particular the evaluation of the effects of homelessness and emergency accommodation on children’s sense of self worth and wellbeing; and her plans to strengthen Tusla’s role in providing supports for children in homelessness. [8871/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I welcome the publication of the tenth edition of the Children’s Rights Alliance Report Card evaluating the Government’s progress on actions for children. The 2018 report acknowledges progress made and the Government’s efforts to improve the lives of children in Ireland. The report rightly highlights the continuing impact of the homelessness crisis on the lives of children. I absolutely acknowledge that homelessness is an extremely distressing experience, and that any medium to long-term period living in a hotel or other emergency accommodation seriously impacts on normal family life and is particularly detrimental to children.

While the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has the ultimate responsibility for managing homelessness, my Department is working closely with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to provide ongoing supports for families in emergency accommodation in order to mitigate the challenges faced by parents and children in this situation.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, works together with other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide services and supports to children, young people and families experiencing homelessness. In my own Department, I have introduced free childcare for the children of families experiencing homelessness. I am happy to say that the families of an additional 196 children are currently availing of childcare under this scheme, while some families were already eligible under existing schemes. As part of the scheme a daily meal is provided for each child.

Actions taken by Tusla include the provision of funding for child support workers and the appointment of a Homelessness Liaison Officer.

Family Resource Centres, part funded by Tusla, are working with families who are experiencing homelessness and many have developed local responses to the needs of children and families in emergency accommodation. These include, by way of example, family fun days, homework support, after school programmes, play therapy and transport services.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with homelessness and school attendance, Tusla’s Educational Welfare Service offers a number of supports to children (and families) experiencing homelessness.

Tusla’s joint protocol with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) covers child welfare and protection matters for children in emergency accommodation. It is fully operational in the DRHE areas and it is intended to replicate this protocol across the State. A Joint Working Protocol has been signed between Tusla and Galway City Council.

Finally, the DRHE is coordinating the development of a comprehensive National Quality

Standards Framework for homeless services on behalf of all housing authorities. Consultation with service users and key stakeholders, including Tusla, has been undertaken and the draft standards have been piloted in selected services. These standards, including a child safety element which will provide homeless services with a framework for continuous quality improvement, will be implemented nationally.

It is important to note that Tusla only intervenes in family life in exceptional circumstances. Children who are with their families in emergency accommodation remain in the care of their parents or guardians. Where Tusla has concerns regarding the welfare and development of any child they will provide family supports to assist that family and child.

Ultimately, my concern is that we minimise and then eliminate the problem of homelessness. In the meantime, I will continue to support measures to help those affected, to the greatest degree possible within my area of responsibility.

### **Departmental Funding**

28. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to make funding available to individual electoral areas for the purposes of playground provision instead of general allocation to local authorities which may overlook areas that have yet to secure funding for such investment. [9005/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The DCYA capital grant funding scheme for play and recreation provides capital funding to support new and existing play and recreation facilities for children and young people. The total amount of funding made available each year is €250,000. A maximum grant of €20,000 is allocated to each Local Authority through the Local Authority Play and Recreation Network (LAPRN). The LAPRN members are invited to apply for funding for projects which provide:

- New and innovative play and recreation spaces and facilities. New and innovative projects can include new facilities, equipment, designs and / or the utilisation of non-traditional play spaces.

- Refurbishment or upgrading of existing play and recreation spaces and facilities.

Under the Capital Grant Scheme for Play and Recreation, 25 awards were made in 2017. The largest amount awarded was for €15,000 and the lowest amount was €5,000.

The LAPRN group was established in 2012 to introduce a more coordinated and interagency approach to achieving the main goals of the play and recreation policies at both national and local level. The members of the group are key Local Authority managers and staff responsible for the local delivery of play and recreation services in communities across the country. The Department is currently working with the LAPRN group to agree priorities for the funding allocation for the current year.

### **Traveller Community**

29. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that despite recognition of Traveller ethnicity in March 2017, infant mortality rates in this group are 3.6 times higher than the rest of the population; her plans to

address same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9020/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I must inform the Deputy that my Department has no responsibility with regard to this issue. If the Deputy has any particular questions regarding health issues, including infant mortality, he should address these to the Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD.

As a lifelong campaigner for equality, social justice and fairness, I regard the recognition of Traveller ethnicity in 2017 as a hugely significant development.

I am concerned that Travellers, and in particular, Traveller children experience many outcomes which are significantly poorer than the average that is experienced and acceptable to the majority of the population of Ireland. This arises in a range of sectors including health, education, employment and accommodation.

This Government is committed to address these disadvantages. My colleagues Minister Charlie Flanagan and Minister of State David Stanton in the Department of Justice and Equality have led the development of the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. Minister Stanton chairs the steering group that oversees the implementation of the strategy. This is an encouraging partnership involving the Traveller representative bodies working with the relevant Government Departments and State Bodies.

### **Child Care Costs**

30. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that childcare costs continue to pose a serious financial challenge for families; the measures she will introduce to address same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8986/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The factors impacting on the costs across delivery of services in any sector are complex and multifaceted. The cost to childcare providers is affected by many factors such as rates, rent, labour costs, and insurance amongst other things.

In September 2017 this Government introduced a number of measures to make childcare more affordable for families in Ireland.

These measures involved:

- A new, universal (non-means tested) subsidy for all children in Tusla-registered childcare aged between 6 months until they are eligible for the ECCE programme, which amounts to up to €1,040 per year for children in full-time childcare.

- Significant increases, of up to 50%, in targeted childcare subsidies provided under existing childcare schemes, specifically the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes (subsidies available of up to €145 per week, per child).

DCYA undertook a comprehensive information campaign to increase parents' awareness of the new and increased childcare subsidies available, and to encourage childcare providers to take part in the schemes.

Currently, the families of over 32,000 children are benefitting from the new universal subsidy, while the families of over 34,000 children are enjoying enhanced targeted subsidies.

This means that over 66,700 children, or 96% of the estimated 70,000 expected to avail of the measures, have registered for support, and the door remains open to parents to apply.

These measures will remain in place in September 2018 to support families until the launch of the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

In order to recognise the additional administrative demands these measures place on childcare providers, a budget of €3.5m in Programme Support Payments (formerly known as ‘Non-Contact Time Payments’) was announced to support providers who sign up to the schemes in recognition of their ‘non-contact time’ and administrative responsibilities.

This payment, which was made in late December 2017, was in addition to the €14.5m Programme Support Payment secured in Budget 2017 for ‘non-contact time’ during the period September 2016-August 2017. A further €18m in Programme Support Payments has been secured for 2018.

Aside from the above measures, over 89,000 children were approved for the free-preschool scheme in September 2017. More children joined in January 2018 and more again will join in April 2018. It is expected that in total about 119,000 children will benefit from ECCE again in 2018.

From September 2018, the three entry points will stop and all children will be eligible for 2 full academic years (76 weeks) of ECCE once the child meets the minimum age requirement.

The new measures, from September 2018, will fully benefit those born from 2015 onwards, whilst those born previous to that year will continue to benefit from the expanded programme announced in Budget 2016. (The average entitlement for the last year to ECCE was approximately 61 weeks. When ECCE was first introduced the entitlement was to 38 weeks.)

A 7% increase in the capitation rate paid to childcare providers for children enrolled on the ECCE Scheme will also come into effect in September 2018.

In total, there are over 170,000 children currently receiving DCYA childcare subventions and this is expected to grow to approximately 180,000 by April.

The first ever Independent Review into the Cost of Delivery of Quality Childcare is under-way and will inform our future policy decisions in this area.

### **Child Care Costs**

31. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the introduction of the universal child care subsidy and its impact on the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8985/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In September 2017 my Department introduced a series of measures to make childcare more accessible and affordable for families in Ireland. These included:

- A new, universal (non-means tested) subsidy for all children in Tusla-registered childcare aged between 6 months until they are eligible for the ECCE programme, which amounts to up to €1,040 per year for children in full-time childcare.

- Significant increases, of up to 50%, in targeted childcare subsidies provided under existing childcare schemes, specifically the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Training and

Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes (subsidies available of up to €145 per week, per child).

DCYA undertook a comprehensive information campaign to increase parents' awareness of the new and increased childcare subsidies available, and to encourage childcare providers to take part in the schemes.

I am delighted to report that the introduction of these measures has been a success. Currently, the families of over 32,000 children are benefitting from the new universal subsidy, 97% of the expected take up.

Over 34,000 children are enjoying enhanced targeted subsidies. This means that over 66,700 children, or 96% of the estimated 70,000 expected to avail of the measures, are now benefitting from these supports, and the door remains open to parents to apply.

These measures will remain in place in September 2018 to support families until the launch of the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Finally, to recognise the additional administrative demands these measures place on childcare providers, a budget of €3.5m in Programme Support Payments (formerly known as 'Non-Contact Time Payments') was announced to support providers who sign up to the schemes in recognition of their 'non-contact time' and administrative responsibilities.

This payment, which was made in late December 2017, was in addition to the €14.5m Programme Support Payment secured in Budget 2017 for 'non-contact time' during the period September 2016-August 2017. The Programme Support Payment of €18m will remain in place for 2018.

### **Legislative Measures**

32. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to ensure the progress of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8882/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 provides for the first time a statutory entitlement to identity information for adopted persons. It provides for a structured and regulated access to information and tracing services for those affected by adoption. It sets out the information that can be provided and the circumstances in which it can be provided to adopted persons and provides that services will be provided by Tusla. A key provision in the Bill provides that an adopted person aged 18 years or over who was adopted prior to commencement of the Bill will be provided with the information required to apply for his or her birth certificate, subject to certain conditions. The Bill passed Second Stage in Seanad Eireann in May 2017.

I am anxious to progress the Bill to ensure that adopted people and their families have access to as much information as possible without impinging on the constitutional rights of all involved. In this regard I intend to request the Chair of Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs for an opportunity to update the Committee on the progress of the Bill and any proposed amendment that Government may consider with a view to proceeding to Committee Stage in the Seanad as soon as possible.

### **Children in Care**

33. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if measures are being considered to address the high number of children under voluntary care orders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8997/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** A child can be received into voluntary care by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, under Section 4 of the Child Care Act, 1991. This section allows Tusla to receive a child into care without a court order, and with the consent of the child's parents, when this is required for the child's welfare or protection.

A voluntary care agreement may be appropriate in situations where a parent requires medical or other treatment, or for other reasons, for a time limited period. Social workers review a child in care's situation at statutory Child In Care Reviews, in consultation with the child's parents and other professionals. It is worth noting that annual figures for admissions and the length of time in care published by Tusla indicate that a significant number of children return home within the year of their being received into care. All of this serves to illustrate that there are the wide range of reasons and time frames for a child being in care.

My Department is not currently considering measures to reduce the number of children being received into the care of Tusla with the agreement of their parents, however, Tusla is expected, in line with best practice, to work co-operatively with parents with full cognisance of their rights as well as the best interests of their children.

Under a commitment given in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the national framework for children and young people in Ireland, my Department has initiated work to review the Child Care Act 1991. All matters relevant to the situation of children in care, including the usage of voluntary care agreements, will be considered in the context of the Review.

### **Child Protection Services Provision**

34. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the procedures in place for children or teenagers at immediate risk; if there is an emergency service plan in place that entails the necessary professional services within the HSE, Tusla and her Department liaising for immediate intervention in urgent situations in which high risk has been established; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8979/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Children or teenagers who are in a situation of immediate risk may initially be dealt with by An Garda Síochána or by Tusla, but in the main both agencies work together in such cases. Tusla, when alerted to a child at immediate risk, for instance a young child left alone at home or abandoned and if the child needs to be removed from that situation will contact An Garda Síochána. The Gardaí may, under their Section 12 powers in the Child Care Act, remove the child from danger and Tusla will then receive the child into their custody and, following an assessment, may apply for an Emergency Care Order. Tusla has emergency foster placements available for such situations.

Where a child of teenager is identified as being at immediate risk from an adult, Tusla will identify if they can be protected from that person by their parent, or by the removal of the adult posing the risk. In such situations Tusla are likely to call a strategy meeting with relevant professionals to share information and to develop a safety plan for the child or teenager. If they cannot be protected in their home, Tusla will apply to the Courts for an Emergency Care Order.

If a child or teenager appears to be at risk of harm or neglect, it is appropriate to report con-

cerns to Tusla. Anyone can report a concern about a child to Tusla, and information on how to do so is available on the Tusla website. If a child or teenager is at immediate risk or in danger, the Gardaí should be alerted without delay.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

35. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which she remains satisfied regarding the availability of community child support services, including the provision of support for afterschool activities through youth clubs and similar bodies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8964/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department continues to invest significant resources in the childcare sector generally. In the last three Budgets (2016, 2017 and 2018) investment in childcare has increased by 80% which reflects the emphasis being placed on improving access to high quality and affordable services .

This investment includes funding of the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and the After School Childcare (ASCC) schemes. CCS is a childcare programme targeted to support parents on a low income to avail of reduced childcare costs. ASCC is designed to support parents on eligible training courses, as well as certain categories of parents returning to work, by providing subsidised childcare places. Eligible children must be under 15 years of age to avail of these supports. Last September, I increased significantly the subsidy paid under CCS to make it more attractive for low income families.

An annual survey conducted by Pobal on my Department's behalf suggests that supply of childcare places currently broadly matches demand. My Department is committed to keeping capacity in the sector under review and Pobal will commence this year's survey in the coming months. Staff from thirty City and County Childcare Committees are available across the country to assist parents who may have difficulty in meeting their childcare needs.

In May 2016 the Programme for a Partnership Government committed my Department to "introduce a new system to support and expand quality afterschool care for school-aged children" . Section 8 of the Programme for a Partnership Government also committed to "utilise our primary school buildings for afterschool care provision for school age children to offer more options and flexibility to parents. We will link additional capitation to the provision of buildings for afterschool care, where demand exists. Community groups and private providers will be invited to tender to use school facilities (outside school hours)."

In Section 10, there is another relevant commitment. "Schools buildings must be utilised out of hours if they are to remain at the centre of communities into the future, both throughout the day and throughout the year, including better utilisation of information technology. Afterschool care, homework clubs and other community activities should be permissible. Additional capitation funding will be linked to the availability of afterschool care options, where demand exists."

My Department chaired a group with the Department of Education and Skills to progress those commitments in a coherent way and to align relevant bodies of work under our respective areas of responsibility. The result of this work, the Action Plan for School Age Childcare, was presented to my Government colleague Minister Bruton and I in March 2017.

Since the Action Plan was published, much progress has been made to advance the Programme for Government commitments. My Department established an expert working group on School Age Childcare (SAC) which has been working over the last year to develop standards and to recommend a quality assurance system for SAC services. The Department of

Education and Skills has published guidelines to assist school authorities consider how their premises might be utilised for SAC and other activities where it can be facilitated by the school patron/trustees. My Department has provided capital grants for the development of Early Years and School-Age Childcare services and uptake has been very high.

Youth Groups might well decide to provide school-age childcare or other services, although to date evidence of this is limited. Youth clubs funded by my Department under the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme must be volunteer-led. While some staff-led targeted youth services are co-located with pre-schools and/or afterschools, the youth funding is not in any way linked to the operation of these services.

### **Protected Disclosures**

36. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department sought further information from the relevant whistleblower regarding health and safety reports which they allege were destroyed as part of a cover up within the Air Corps; and if not, the reason therefor. [9078/18]

**Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I appointed an independent third party to review allegations made in a number of protected disclosures relating to health and safety issues in the Air Corps which were received in late 2015 and early 2016.

No specific information has been sought from the correspondents in relation to reports which were the subject of an allegation of destruction contained in correspondence which was also sent to the Deputy.

I sent the report of the independent third party to those who had made disclosures for their views and I am considering the next steps in the process having received those views and in the context of ongoing litigation.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

37. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of officials and advisors that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9156/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I attended the NDP and NPF launch in the Institute of Technology Sligo on 16 February 2018 accompanied by two special advisors. No official of the Department attended the event. Outside normal travel expenses, which have not yet been calculated, no costs were incurred by the Department of Defence.

### **Passport Services**

38. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the procedure to be followed with regard to section 14(6) of the Passports Act 2008 which allows a person that has an interest in the welfare of a child that is an Irish citizen to apply for a passport for that child without the consent of a guardian; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9049/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act 2008 (“the Act”). In the case of children and among other requirements, section 14 of the Act requires the Minister to be satisfied on reasonable grounds that appropriate consent for issue of a passport has been provided. In general, consent is required as follows:

- Where the child has 2 guardians, consent of each guardian
- Where the child has more than 2 guardians, consent by not fewer than 2 of those guardians.

A number of other circumstances are also provided for in the Act, including where a court in the State has made an order dispensing with the consent of a guardian; where a court in the State has made an order authorising a person other than a guardian (including the Health Service Executive) to give consent for issue of a passport to a child; as well as separate provision for cases where the child and his/her guardians are ordinarily resident outside the State.

Section 14(6) of the Act provides that

Subject to this Act, the Minister may, on application in that behalf to him or her in accordance with section 6 by a guardian of the child or any other person who has an interest in the welfare of the child, issue a passport to the child without the consent to such issue of the other guardian or, if appropriate, any of the guardians of the child if the Minister is satisfied that—

- ( a ) there exist in relation to the child exceptional circumstances involving an immediate and serious risk of harm to his or her life, health or safety requiring him or her to undertake travel for which a passport is required, and
- ( b ) for the purpose of securing the welfare of the child, a passport should be issued to the child.

This provision was always intended, and by its explicit terms is, intended for exceptional cases. Discretion to issue a passport in such cases without the consent of a guardian/guardians is conditional on a high threshold being met, namely cases involving:

exceptional circumstances;  
an immediate and serious risk of harm to the child; and  
the welfare of the child.

A range of circumstances can be envisaged in which the section may be relevant. These might include, for example, situations such as an Irish citizen child unaccompanied overseas in circumstances where his/her guardian(s) have been injured, passed away or disappeared; an Irish citizen child with complex medical needs in a conflict, emergency or otherwise insecure setting where his/her welfare is at risk; and so on.

Any decision on whether this section was appropriate for use in any particular case would depend on all the particular facts and circumstances. If a particular case is at issue, I would urge the Deputy or the persons concerned to make direct contact with the Passport Service (Ms Teresa McHugh) for further guidance.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

39. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of officials and advisors that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9150/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** One adviser and one official travelled from my Department to the launch of the National Development Plan 2018 – 2027 and National Planning Framework in County Sligo. To date no related travel costs have been incurred by my Department. In line with relevant circulars issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, officers are entitled to claim travel and subsistence expenses associated with their attendance.

### Northern Ireland

40. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the recent discussions he has had with authorities in the United States of America in relation to the appointment of a special envoy to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9197/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Successive US Administrations have provided immensely valuable support to the peace process over the last three decades, and this support continues to be provided by the current US Administration, as well as by our many friends in Congress. The Government strongly appreciates the sustained engagement by the current US Administration, including by the US State Department, in relation to Northern Ireland and we look forward to this continuing into the future. In this regard, the Government would very much welcome the appointment of a Special Envoy for Northern Ireland by the current Administration, as part of its continuing support for the Peace Process. I will be meeting with members of the US Administration in Washington tomorrow.

With regard to the Peace Process and the current situation in Northern Ireland, I will be emphasising the importance of continued support and engagement by the US Administration and Congress as efforts continue to get the devolved, power-sharing institutions of the Agreement operating again as quickly as possible.

I will also be underlining that, notwithstanding the current challenges, the twentieth anniversary in April of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement will

be a very important moment to recognise and affirm the achievement of lasting peace in Northern Ireland, as well as the transformation in political relationships which the Agreement has enabled.

This has been achieved with the constant and immensely valuable support and friendship of the United States Government and people, every step of the way over the last three decades. To protect and further this historic collective achievement, all of us with responsibilities, interest and influence should continue to work to advance peace and reconciliation, with the Good Friday Agreement as the unshakeable foundation of the Peace Process.

### Northern Ireland

41. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals there are to have talks resumed in relation to the need to have the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9198/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government, working with the British Government, has spared no effort in supporting and facilitating talks on the formation of a new

Executive, over many months. Fully functioning, devolved, power-sharing Institutions are the only way forward for Northern Ireland, and are urgently required. Last week's developments in Stormont are of serious concern to all of us who want to see the establishment of a functioning, power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland, and the other Institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Government is working with the British Government to see if there is any prospect of re-engagement with the parties in the period ahead.

The Taoiseach spoke with Prime Minister May on Monday and emphasised the Government's full commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, and its determination to secure the effective operation of all its institutions.

I spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the same day as part of our regular engagement, as we work to seek a way forward from the current impasse in the discussions to secure the formation of a new Executive.

As co-guarantor of the Agreement, the Government will continue to engage with the British Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland to support the urgent formation of a new Executive by the mandated political parties. The Taoiseach and I met with Sinn Féin on Monday and we are also keeping in contact with the other parties.

The Government's firm position is that the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements must be implemented in full, and in this context the Taoiseach and I have been clear that the Government does not want to see the introduction of direct rule in Northern Ireland.

As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, the British and Irish Governments have an obligation to uphold and protect the letter and spirit of that Agreement, and we will also be considering how best to do so in the current situation.

### **Primary Medical Certificates Eligibility**

42. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to improve the criteria for persons wishing to avail of the primary medical certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9204/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;

- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure costing €65 million in each of 2016 and 2017 (excluding motor tax foregone). From time to time I receive representations on behalf of individuals who believe they would benefit from the scheme but do not qualify under the criteria. While I have sympathy for such cases, given the scale and scope of the scheme, there are no plans to review the medical criteria eligibility at this time.

Finally, I would like to point out that the Government's legislative programme for 2018 includes the Health (Transport Support) Bill which provides for a scheme to make individual payments as a contribution towards transport costs to persons with severe disabilities on a low income who cannot access public transport. The legislation is being brought forward by my colleague the Minister for Health. Persons who do not meet the medical criteria for the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme may qualify for the proposed Transport Support Scheme.

### **Tax Data**

43. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tenancies in which a 100% interest relief deduction was claimed under section 97(2K) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 as inserted by section 15 of the Finance Act 2015 in each of the years since the inception of this provision; and the cost to the Exchequer in each of these years. [9211/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Finance Act 2015 introduced a new relief for landlords who commit to let their property to tenants in receipt of social housing supports for a minimum period of three years. It allows landlords to claim an increased expense deduction for mortgage interest in their rental accounts – they will be able to claim 100% of relevant mortgage interest, in place of the 85% generally allowed at present in respect of rented residential property (increased from 80% in 2017 and 75% in 2016).

I am advised by Revenue that data on the number of taxpayer units availing of the 100% interest relief reduction on residential property, and the number of tenancies that this relates to, is not yet available. The provisions under section 97(2K) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 came into effect from 1 January 2016 and, as part of the eligibility criteria, the length of the tenancy must be three years. Therefore, the earliest date on which a benefit may accrue is 1 January 2019. Information on the numbers or cost will not be available until tax returns for 2019 are filed, which will be in late 2019 or 2020 depending on the relevant Income Tax or Corporation Tax periods.

However, the Deputy may be aware that one of the criteria to avail of the relief is that a commitment must be registered with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) at the commencement of the three-year period. Data from the RTB indicate that uptake of the scheme to date has been positive, with over 2,991 tenancy commitments registered to date. Qualifying tenancies have been registered in all 26 counties and the numbers are set out in the table below:

County	Number of Statutory Declarations up to February 2018	% of Total
Dublin	1006	33.6%
Cork	314	10.5%
Galway	145	4.8%
Donegal	114	3.8%
Kildare	146	4.9%
Mayo	85	2.8%
Limerick	107	3.6%
Waterford	93	3.1%
Wexford	101	3.4%
Tipperary	95	3.2%
Meath	98	3.3%
Louth	96	3.2%
Kerry	59	2.0%
Carlow	69	2.3%
Wicklow	59	2.0%
Clare	44	1.5%
Sligo	45	1.5%
Kilkenny	44	1.5%
Roscommon	33	1.1%
Offaly	31	1.0%
Westmeath	57	1.9%
Longford	32	1.1%
Laois	45	1.5%
Leitrim	24	0.8%
Cavan	32	1.1%
Monaghan	17	0.6%
Total	2991	

### Freedom of Information Requests

44. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason his Department is failing to release two freedom of information requests (details supplied) which were requested in August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9046/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department endeavours to comply with the decision deadlines set out in the Freedom of Information Act 2014. However, the scope of work of the Department, especially in preparing the Budget, the Finance Bill, and associated Oireachtas briefings, sometimes delays the processing of freedom of information requests.

In relation to the two freedom of information requests referred to by the Deputy, I can confirm that the requests concerned are under active consideration, and replies are expected to issue in relation to them shortly.

### Tax Reliefs Eligibility

45. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Finance if HRI tax relief can be claimed for work carried out five years ago in circumstances in which the person was unemployed at the time and not paying income tax but has returned to work in 2017 and is paying tax again. [9050/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit in respect of repair, renovation or improvements works on principal private residences or rental properties where the works are carried out by tax compliant contractors. The repair, renovation or improvement works must have been carried out on or after 25 October 2013 and on or before 31 December 2018. If works were in progress on 25 October 2013, only the portion of the works carried out and paid for on or after 25 October 2013 qualifies for the relief.

I am advised by Revenue that where all conditions of the incentive are satisfied, the relief is given by way of a tax credit split evenly over the two years following the year in which the works are paid for. Where a claimant does not have sufficient income tax liability to utilise the tax credit in full over the two years following the year in which the works were paid for, then the credit is carried forward to subsequent years until it has been used in full. The amount of the credit used in any tax year cannot be greater than the amount which reduces the income tax charged on the claimant in that tax year to nil.

#### VAT Rebates

46. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims for a VAT refund under the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No. 15) Order 1981 in each of the past four years. [9065/18]

47. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance the amount in money terms of VAT refunds granted by the Revenue Commissioners under the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No. 15) Order 1981 in each of the past four years. [9066/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 46 and 47 together.

The Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 15) Order 1981 provides for the refund of VAT on certain aids and appliances used by disabled persons.

I am advised by The Revenue Commissioners that the table below sets out the number of VAT claims and amounts refunded in accordance with the Order for the years 2014 to 2017 (inclusive).

	No of Claims	VAT Amount Refunded (€)
2014	4,315	€2,979,405.11
2015	3,949	€3,949,169.27
2016	5,065	€4,191,468.18
2017	5,813	€4,803,852.96

#### VAT Rate Application

48. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance the reason motor vehicles are

excluded from the Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No. 15) Order 1981. [9067/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Value-Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No. 15) Order, 1981 enables VAT paid on qualifying goods, such as aids and appliances constructed or adapted for use by a disabled person, to be refunded where the goods are purchased for the exclusive use of disabled persons suffering a specified degree of disablement. I am advised by The Revenue Commissioners that motor vehicles are excluded from the Order because the qualifying provisions for the Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme (contained in Statutory Instrument No. 353 of 1994 Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations, 1994) provide for a refund of VAT and residual vehicle registration tax for disabled drivers, passengers and organisations.

### **Fiscal Policy**

49. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Exchequer borrowing requirement will be revised in each of the years 2018 to 2027 further to the announcement of the national development plan 2018 to 2027; the general debt developments (details supplied), in tabular form; the amount by which the Exchequer borrowing requirement will be revised in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9084/18]

50. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the net fiscal space for 2019, 2020 and 2021 accounting for the national development plan 2018 to 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9085/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 50 together.

There are two specific changes to the Exchequer Borrowing Requirement (EBR) as published in the Economic and Fiscal Outlook for Budget 2018. These forecasts cover the period to 2021.

The first relates to the passing of the Water Services Bill 2017 into law. As explained in the Economic and Fiscal Outlook, Chapter 7 'Budgetary Reform', Irish Water's current and capital funding requirements for domestic water services will come from the Vote of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services 2018 (REV) sets out the impacts in voted expenditure for 2018.

As these are simply reallocations between expenditure of a general government body and the Exchequer, this has no impact on the general government balance. The general government debt impact has already been included in the calculations.

Gross voted capital expenditure for 2018 in the National Development Plan (NDP) is consistent with the REV.

Secondly, the NDP announced four funds which will begin operating from 2019. These are the Rural, Urban, Innovation and Climate Action Funds.

The funds will be partly covered by an unallocated capital reserve in the first instance, leaving an additional cost, which will both pre-commit unallocated fiscal space and worsen the EBR.

The EBR and general government debt developments table will be updated in the draft Stability Programme Update for 2018 to be published in mid-April.

The net nominal EBR increase resulting from the three funds is set out in the last row of the table below:

New Funds, € mil- lions	2019	2020	2021
Rural	55	80	80
Urban	100	120	150
Innovation	20	30	40
TOTAL	175	230	270
Less Capital Reserve	-98	-136	-94
Net Increase	77	94	176

As the Climate Action Fund, set out in the table below, will be funded from the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) levy, it will have no impact on Voted Expenditure or the EBR.

€ millions	2019	2020	2021
Climate Action Fund	20	30	40

In calculating the impact on net fiscal space under the Expenditure Benchmark, it is assumed that both the Urban and Rural Funds will be recorded as gross fixed capital formation (i.e. subject to 'capital smoothing' over four years) and that the Innovation and Climate Action Funds will be treated as capital grants (i.e. not smoothed). A further assumption is that the funding from the capital reserve will offset the Rural and Urban Funds.

Should the operation of the funds change these assumptions then the figures below will need to be amended.

The cost, in fiscal space terms, of the four funds is therefore:

€ millions	2019	2020	2021
Fiscal Space Used	54	36	54

Updated calculations of fiscal space will be published in the Summer Economic Statement 2018 following the publication by the European Commission of the required inputs to the calculation in conjunction with its Spring Economic Forecast.

## Inflation Rate

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address inflation in view of the investment announced in the national development plan 2018 to 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9086/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Inflation in Ireland and other developed economies has been subdued for a prolonged period. While inflation picked up elsewhere last year, inflation in Ireland remained close to zero. Overall HICP inflation averaged just 0.3 per cent last year, the fifth consecutive year of inflation below 1 per cent. By contrast, inflation in the euro area as a whole, on a HICP basis, averaged 1.5 per cent last year.

Inflation is not, therefore, a short-term risk at present. However, over the medium term as temporary exchange rate shocks, which have been a significant contributing factor to low inflation in Ireland over the past couple of years, subside, and the economy approaches full employment, price pressures may emerge. The increased investment announced in the national development plan 2018 – 2027 (NDP 2018 - 2027) could potentially contribute to this. However, the

NDP 2018 – 2027 recognises the importance of ensuring the affordability and sustainability of capital spending plans to minimise the risk of overheating, and as a consequence, the risk of contributing to price pressures.

A further mitigating factor is that public investment has an important role to play in boosting the capacity of the economy, which would tend to reduce price pressures. In addition, the NDP 2018 – 2027 is focused on targeting bottle-necks of particular concern such as in housing. Addressing the housing shortage would alleviate price pressures in the rental market.

I have emphasised, on a number of occasions the importance of ensuring that Budgetary policy does not contribute to overheating pressures in the economy and the pro-cyclical policies of the past are not repeated and this is reflected in the NDP 2018 – 2027. My Department will continue to closely monitor price developments as we seek to ensure that the competitiveness gains over the past few years do not unwind. To this end, the Government will continue to manage the public finances in a prudent manner and maintain competitiveness-orientated policies.

### **Economic Policy**

52. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the risk of overheating the economy as a result of the national development plan 2018 to 2027; the inflation forecasts for each year up to 2027; if investment in major capital projects will be held back if the economy is overheating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9089/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Although the economic recovery has been much faster than anticipated, developments in the labour market, which is probably the best barometer of the Irish economy given distortions to GDP and GNP, suggest that the economy is not yet operating at full capacity. While unemployment has fallen rapidly to 6.1 per cent in January, from a peak of 16 per cent in 2012, this is still above the level considered to represent full employment in Ireland. Further, price pressures in Ireland remain subdued, with overall annual inflation as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) averaging just 0.3 per cent last year, the fifth consecutive year of inflation below 1 per cent.

Forecasts published with Budget 2018 envisage the HICP reaching 2 per cent per year by the end of the forecast horizon in 2021, broadly consistent with the ECB's target. The Budget 2018 forecasts do not extend beyond 2021. However, the National Development Plan 2018 – 2027 (NDP 2018 - 2027) assumed 2 per cent inflation (GNI\* deflator) over the period 2018 – 2027 which is consistent with long term growth forecasts for the Irish economy produced by international organisations.

Notwithstanding the current slack in the economy, with the labour market approaching full employment, stronger than assumed growth could lead to overheating pressures. While increased public investment through the NDP 2018 - 2027 could potentially contribute to this, it is important to recognise that the plan is focused on rectifying the relatively low levels of public capital investment in Ireland following the recent recession.

In fact, the NDP 2018 - 2027 is targeted at reducing overheating risks by increasing the economy's potential growth rate and alleviating capacity constraints. Notwithstanding this, the NDP 2018 – 2027 recognises the dangers that increased public investment could contribute to overheating if the pace of implementation was inappropriate for the cyclical position of the economy. However, the NDP 2018 – 2027 adopts a prudent and measured approach to increasing public capital spending. Under the NDP 2018 – 2027 it is projected that public capital investment will reach 3.8% of national income (GNI\*) in 2021 and 4% by 2024, with sustained

investment averaging 4% on an annual basis over the period 2022 to 2027.

In addition, there are a number of other steps that will be taken to mitigate overheating risks and negate the possible need to defer major capital projects owing to overheating risks:

- The increase in public capital spending will be consistent with overall fiscal objectives.
- The growth in public capital spending will be at a planned and moderate rate which does not outstrip the pace of the supply response feasible from the broad construction sector.
- Increased public capital spending will be aligned with sustainable growth in public expenditure overall by ensuring the continuation of moderate and prudent growth in current spending.
- There will be a renewed strategic focus on supporting the strengthening of the capacity, capability and degree of competition of the domestic construction sector in Ireland as well as on encouraging and promoting market entry from abroad by confirming and highlighting the planned scale of Ireland's public capital investment plans.
- As detailed in the National Development Plan, a Construction Sector Working Group will be established to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector.

The NDP 2018-2027 will be implemented in the context of broader government fiscal policy, which is to maintain a fiscal stance which is appropriate to the cyclical position of the economy, while targeting a continuing reduction in our debt burden.

I have emphasised on a number of occasions the importance of ensuring that Budgetary policy does not contribute to overheating pressures in the economy and that the pro-cyclical policies of the past are not repeated and this is reflected in the NDP 2018 – 2027.

### **Stability and Growth Pact**

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expectation of the structural balance under the stability and growth pact for 2018 in view of the announcement of the national development plan 2018 to 2027; the amount by which the structural balance is set to meet the State's medium term objective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9090/18]

54. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the expenditure benchmark under the stability and growth pact will be met in 2018 in view of the announcement of the national development plan 2018 to 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9091/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 54 together.

The level of gross voted capital expenditure for 2018 of €5.8 billion set out in Table 3.1 of the National Development Plan, which is the same as the level set out in the 2018 Revised Estimates Volume, is consistent with the general government expenditure forecasts included in Budget 2018.

Therefore, the forecasts for both general government expenditure and the general government balance for 2018 are unchanged. As a result, the forecast compliance, in 2018, with the fiscal rules, as set out on Budget day in relation to both the expenditure benchmark and the improvement in the structural balance is unchanged.

The Deputy should note that updated economic and fiscal forecasts will be published in the draft Stability Programme Update in mid-April.

### **Credit Union Lending**

55. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulation Act 2012 to allow the credit unions lend to affordable housing bodies and local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9092/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Credit Union and Co-Operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 introduced changes to the Credit Union Act, 1997 (the 1997 Act). Since 1 January 2016, section 43 of the 1997 Act provides that the Central Bank may prescribe investments in which a credit union may invest its funds.

Following engagement with the credit union sector on proposals for credit unions to provide funding for the provision of social housing, the Central Bank undertook a review of the investment framework for credit unions in 2017. This review resulted in the publication of Consultation Paper 109 (CP109) which consulted on potential changes to the investment framework for credit unions. One of the proposals in CP109 was that credit unions be permitted to provide funding for the provision of social housing to Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

Submissions to CP109 were broadly supportive of credit unions providing funding to Tier 3 AHBs with a significant number of those in favour citing the alignment of the social goals of both the credit union movement and the AHB sector as the principal rationale for permitting this type of investment.

Taking account of the feedback provided to CP109, on 1 February 2018 the Central Bank outlined that it intends to proceed with the addition of investment in Tier 3 AHBs as a permitted investment class for credit unions. Regulations giving effect to this change, will be commenced on 1 March 2018. From this date, credit unions will be permitted to provide funding to Tier 3 AHBs for the provision of social housing. The maximum permitted investment amount per credit union is 50% of regulatory reserves where a credit union has total assets of at least €100 million and 25% of regulatory reserves for all other credit unions. These limits may facilitate a combined sector investment in Tier 3 AHBs of close to €700 million.

The Central Bank is open to considering further investment proposals. As was the case with proposals around credit unions investing in social housing, where the Central Bank receives detailed proposals which can demonstrate that an investment could fall within the appropriate risk profile for credit union investments, it will consider further amendments to the investment regulations to facilitate such investments in the future.

The Central Bank has committed to undertaking and publishing analysis of credit union sector investments, two years post commencement of the amending investment regulations for credit unions, to assess and analyse the actual impact which the changes to the investment regulations have had.

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

56. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend the cycle to work scheme to self employed persons and those that self-assess their taxes; the estimated

cost of such an extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9103/18]

57. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase the allowance under the cycle to work scheme for those purchasing e-bikes; the estimated cost of such an extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9104/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 57 together.

The Cycle to Work Scheme exempts (from income tax, employee PRSI and USC) the benefit-in-kind (BIK) arising from the provision of a bicycle / cycle safety equipment by an employer to an employee (or director), where the bicycle is used by the employee to cycle to and from work or between workplaces.

I have no plans to amend the Scheme as suggested since the concept of BIK does not arise in the case of the self-employed. For self-employed persons all expenses “wholly and exclusively” incurred for the purpose of their trade or profession are allowable for tax purposes. There is no tax deduction for self-employed persons in respect of costs incurred by them in relation to travelling to and from their place of business.

While schemes of this nature are kept under review by my officials, at present I do not have any specific plans to change the maximum value exempted.

### **Loan Books Purchasers**

58. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the reported sale of a €4 billion portfolio of home loans and mortgages by a bank (details supplied) to sub-prime lenders and vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9136/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Addressing high NPL ratios is one of the key priorities of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). PTSB’s latest published NPL ratio of 28% is one of the highest in the Eurozone. It is over five times the European average. Therefore, PTSB must deliver a significant reduction in its NPL ratio, and within a timeframe, that meets the expectations of the SSM.

Given the volume of borrowers who have refused to engage with the bank to date, and the number of cases where treatments have failed, achieving an acceptable NPL ratio will not be possible without loan sales.

It is important to highlight that the contractual terms of borrowers remain in place post a loan sale. In addition, all the protection enjoyed by borrowers under the CCMA is unaffected.

Under the terms of the Relationship Framework, which is a legally binding agreement between myself, as Minister for Finance and the bank, loan sales do not require my consent. However, the bank is required to consult with me when a loan sale reaches an advanced stage and is of a significant scale. Although I have been briefed on the matter, the formal consultation has not yet taken place but will do so in due course.

While loan sales are regrettable, I am also conscious of the need for the bank to continue on its path to recovery such that it can support our citizens through its deposit and lending activity. PTSB is a very important part of the Irish banking sector with over 1 million customers, €21bn of mortgage loans and €17bn of customer deposits. The bank also employs c. 2,500 staff.

## **Fiscal Policy**

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on deposit and withdrawal mechanisms if the Government proceeds to establish a rainy day fund. [9137/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will recall, on 31 January last I appeared before the Oireachtas Budgetary Oversight Committee to discuss the proposal to establish a Rainy Day Fund.

That engagement was part of the consultation between my Department and the Oireachtas, following the publication of my Department's Rainy Day Fund consultation paper along with Budget 2018 last October. At the hearing on 31 January, I outlined the rationale for establishing the Rainy Day Fund, the key design concepts in terms of size, deposits, withdrawals and replenishment; and considerations regarding issues such as the State's debt levels and the EU's fiscal rules.

I both welcome and appreciate the views of Oireachtas members and I am now considering those views, as well as those shared via submissions, including those from the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and Fianna Fáil.

Separate to this, I now also await the report of the Budgetary Oversight Committee which, as the Deputy will note, is due over the coming weeks, as indicated by the Chair during the session.

It is my intention, in the context of all of these views and submissions, to progress the Rainy Day Fund proposal in terms of the key design and operational concepts, and to progress the enabling legislation for the Rainy Day Fund's establishment. The legislation will set out the proposed deposit and withdrawal mechanisms taking account of all these views and submissions.

## **Sale of State Assets**

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the approach to the sale of State assets in the commercial banks; and the purposes for which disposal of State shares will be earmarked. [9138/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the State currently owns c. 71% of the shares in AIB, 14% of the shares in Bank of Ireland, and c. 75% of the shares in Permanent TSB. Following the IPO of AIB last year all three of our bank investments are now listed on the main markets of the Irish and London stock exchanges, providing improved liquidity and marketability for the State's shares.

Officials in my Department continue to monitor the performance of the banks, their share prices and equity markets more generally to determine the next sensible opportunity to realise value from our investments. It is important to point out that exiting our investments in a measured way that will optimise value for our citizens, will take a number of years, but I do not propose to set out a rigid timeline for disposal. To do so would potentially impact the value we can achieve. However as I have said before I believe that over the medium term we will recoup all of the money that we invested in these banks during the financial crisis.

In order to proceed with another sale of bank shares, I would need to be satisfied that the market was prepared to put a fair and reasonable value on the bank's equity, bearing in mind its current performance, future prospects and the outlook for the economy, and I would do so on the advice of officials in my Department. It should be noted that the 'Programme for a Partner-

ship Government' places limits on the sale of shares before the end of 2018.

### Revenue Commissioners Data

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the size and key break-down elements of outstanding tax owed by commercial entities and the farming sector to the Revenue Commissioners at the end of each of the years 2013 to 2017. [9139/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the data requested by the Deputy cannot be compiled in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly in the matter when the available data is provided to me by Revenue. The table sets out the overall tax debt for each of the years 2013 – 2016, as published by Revenue, in its annual report for each of those years.

YEAR	Total Debt €	Debt available for collection €
2013	€1.84bn	€1.01bn
2014	€1.695bn	€907m
2015	€1.812bn	€823m
2016	€1.94bn	€755m

### European Central Bank

62. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason no public competition was held to identify a person for nomination to a possible position on the executive board of the European Central Bank. [9140/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I nominated the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, Professor Philip Lane, earlier this month for the position of Vice-President of the European Central Bank. This was on the basis that Professor Lane is an exceptionally well-qualified candidate who would make an ideal person to serve on the Executive Board of the European Central Bank.

### Central Bank of Ireland Staff

63. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which vacancies for the positions of governor, deputy governor and executive directors of the Central Bank are filled; and the reason public competitions are not held for all these positions in view of the crucial role of the bank in monetary policy. [9141/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to clarify for the Deputy that where vacancies in the positions of deputy governors and directors of the Central Bank of Ireland arise, open competitions are the usual method of filling the vacancies. The current Governor was also appointed by open competition.

The legislative background for filling vacancies for the positions of governor, deputy governors and directors of the Central Bank of Ireland is set out below.

#### (i) Governor

Section 19 of the Central Bank Act 1942 provides that the Governor shall be appointed by the President on the advice of the Government.

The current Governor was appointed after an open call for expressions of interest in tandem with the hiring of specialist international Executive Search services, the rationale behind the dual process being to ensure as open a competition as possible.

### **(ii) Deputy Governor**

In a legislative context, the Central Bank's Deputy Governors are referenced as "Heads of Function" (Section 23 of the Central Bank Act 1942 provides that a reference to the Heads of Function is a reference to the Head of Central Banking and the Head of Financial Regulation). Section 23B of the Central Bank Act 1942 further provides:

(1) The Commission shall, with the consent of the Minister, appoint suitably qualified persons as Heads of Function.

(2) Subject to subsection (3), an appointment as a Head of Function shall be made by open competition.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply to the appointment of a Head of Function if the Commission, with the consent of the Minister, decides that appointment to the office by open competition would be inappropriate.

"The Commission" in this Section 23B refers to the Central Bank Commission while "the Minister" refers to the Minister for Finance. The Head of Central Banking and the Head of Financial Regulation are known as the Deputy Governor – Central Banking and the Deputy Governor – Prudential Regulation respectively.

### **(iii) Director**

The role of director within the Central Bank of Ireland is not a statutory role and has no legislative basis. A director within the Central Bank does not sit on the Central Bank Commission. Section 6D of the Central Bank Act 1942 addresses the appointment of staff within the Central Bank generally (including directors). This section provides that an appointment must be made by competition to be conducted in accordance with rules made by the Commission but this provision does not apply in circumstances where the Commission decides that appointment to the position by competition would be inappropriate.

Based on the foregoing, vacancies at Deputy Governor and Executive Director level are generally filled by open competition advertised for a 2-3 week duration through national and, on occasion, international media. Applicants are then shortlisted into the selection process which is as follows:

- 1st round interview – generally a technical and competency based interview;

- Assessment Centre – conducted by external occupational psychologists;

- 2nd round interview & presentation – one relevant non-executive Central Bank Commission member participates at this stage of the process and an external independent panel member may also participate at this stage. For all Director level vacancies, a combination of any two from the Deputy Governor Central Banking, Deputy Governor Prudential Regulation or Director General Financial Conduct also participate.

- For Director level roles, the final stage of the process is an interview with the Governor.

On occasion, vacancies at Director level, may be filled by a lateral transfer (i.e. by a serving member of staff at the same salary grade as the vacancy). On such occasions, and where the full selection process as outlined above is not considered necessary, the lateral transfer decision to appoint to the role will be made by the Governor, in consultation with a relevant non-executive Commission member and the relevant members of the Governor's Committee.

The above process has been approved by the Central Bank's Audit Committee and aligns with Section 3.8 of the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies which states that non-executive directors should bring an independent judgment to bear on issues of strategy, performance, resources, key appointments, and standards of conduct in State Bodies.

The following roles in the Bank are considered as "key appointments" for the purpose of Section 3.8 of the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies:

- Deputy Governor-Central Banking;
- Deputy Governor-Prudential Regulation;
- Director General- Financial Conduct;
- Chief Operations Officer;
- All executive Director roles;
- Head of Internal Audit;
- Head of Organisational Risk;
- Head of Financial Control;
- Registrar of Credit Unions;
- General Counsel;
- Secretary of the Central Bank.

### **NAMA Operations**

64. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the remaining work of NAMA; the estimated likely net proceeds from the completion of NAMA; and the statutory task and future roles he envisages for the agency. [9142/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to advise the Deputy that it is expected that NAMA will substantially complete its work by 2020. The Agency announced in October 2017 that it had redeemed all of its €30.2bn in Senior Debt which was guaranteed by the State. However, notwithstanding the successful achievement of this primary and important objective, three years ahead of schedule, there is still a significant body of work yet to be completed by NAMA.

Subject to current market conditions prevailing, this includes redemption of NAMA's subordinated debt of €1.6 billion by March 2020 and completion of its Dublin Docklands SDZ and residential funding programmes. The most recent details on NAMA's remaining work are available in the Agency's Annual Statement 2018. This is available on the NAMA website via: <https://www.nama.ie/about-us/publications/section-53-reports-and-accounts/>.

The carrying value of NAMA's loan portfolio at 30 September 2017, net of impairment, was €3.7bn. Much of this portfolio is secured by low-value, granular assets and realisation of its full market value over the next three years will require patient and extensive work on the part of NAMA. It is through the successful completion of its deleveraging, Docklands and residential funding programmes that NAMA currently projects a surplus in the region of €3bn to be returned to the State once it completes its work. As per section 60(2) of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA may use surplus funds to redeem and cancel its senior and subordinated debt. Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's debt has been redeemed in full.

Any NAMA surplus paid, while Exchequer positive, will not impact the general government balance, in line with Eurostat rules. It will be a decision for the Government as to how any surplus returned by NAMA will be utilised within the framework of the fiscal rules.

NAMA was mandated in late 2009 to deal expeditiously with its acquired loan portfolio and to extract best value from that portfolio. NAMA has been extremely successful in achieving this mandate and has now entered into the final phase of this work which involves completing its remaining deleveraging activity and implementing its residential delivery programme and Dublin Docklands SDZ programme.

As such I do not intend to extend the current remit of NAMA beyond its expected completion in 2020 and in line with its original approval from the EU Commission in February 2010. However, I refer the Deputy to the announcement in my Budget statement in October 2017 of the establishment of Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI), which is intended to increase the availability of debt funding on market terms to commercially viable residential development projects. It is my intention that HBFI will draw on the expertise and experience in residential development funding that currently resides in NAMA in order to efficiently deliver on its objectives.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

65. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of officials and advisors that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9146/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** One member of staff (adviser) traveled to the launch of the NCP and NPF in County Sligo. No travel and subsistence claims in relation to this event have been received, at the time of writing.

### **Stamp Duty**

66. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance the supports or reliefs that exist for family transfers of small businesses from the increased rate of 6% stamp duty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9170/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the transfer of a business and its associated assets within a family constitutes a conveyance on sale for stamp duty purposes. Stamp duty is payable by the person receiving the business assets. Where the business assets are sold or otherwise transferred for less than market value, section 30 Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999 imposes a charge to stamp duty at the market value of the assets transferred.

There are no reliefs that may apply in such cases. Family relationships are not relevant for stamp duty purposes, other than in the case of certain transfers of farmland between family members where a relief known as ‘consanguinity relief’ may apply. This relief applies a reduced rate of stamp duty of 1% to transfers of farmland between certain blood relatives provided certain conditions are met involving the active farming of the land on a commercial basis.

### **Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme**

67. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to improve tax relief measures in relation to the purchase of vehicles for use by persons with a disability; when such measures will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9203/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As you may be aware, the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

The tax reliefs under the scheme are very significant, with a maximum tax relief in respect of persons purchasing an extensively adapted vehicle set at €22,000. A summary table of these tax reliefs can be accessed at page 21 of the document at the following link

*<https://www.revenue.ie/en/importing-vehicles-duty-free-allowances/documents/vrt/vrt7.pdf>*.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure, costing €65m in each of 2016 and 2017. This figure does not include the revenue foregone in respect of the relief from Motor Tax. I have no plans to increase the tax reliefs under the scheme.

### **Tax Reliefs Eligibility**

68. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to restore tax relief for trade union subscriptions; the results of a review into the issue carried out by his Department in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9210/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The review of the appropriate treatment for tax purposes of trade union subscriptions and professional body fees carried out by my Department in 2016 was included in the 2016 report on tax expenditures published on budget day 2016 *[http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax\\_Expenditures\\_Report%202016\\_final.pdf](http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report%202016_final.pdf)*.

The review concluded that “analysis of the scheme using the principles laid down by the Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines shows that it fails to reach the evaluation threshold to warrant introduction in this manner.

The reinstatement of this tax relief would have no justifiable policy rationale and does not express a defined policy objective. Given that individuals join trade unions largely for the well-known benefits of membership, and the potential value of the relief to an individual would equate to just over €1 per week, this scheme would have little to no incentive effect on the numbers choosing to join. There is no specific market failure that needs to be addressed by such a scheme, and it would consist largely of deadweight.”

Given the conclusion of the review, I have no plans to reintroduce such a relief.

## **Mortgage Repayments**

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the rules regarding the ownership of accounts into which a mortgage borrower makes repayments when the mortgage loan is owned by an unregulated loan owner and is serviced by a regulated credit servicing firm; if the account must be in the name of the regulated credit servicing firm; if it can be in the name of the unregulated loan owner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9222/18]

**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 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.

Credit servicing firms must act in accordance with the requirements of Irish financial services law that applies to ‘regulated financial service providers’. This ensures that consumers, whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory Codes of Conduct issued by the Central Bank.

The 2015 Act does not include any specific rules regarding whether the account must be in the name of the regulated credit servicing firm or if it can be in the name of the unregulated loan owner.

## **Bond Markets**

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 151 of 13 February 2018, the interest rate charged on the €602 million in Exchequer borrowings; the maturity date of these borrowings; the cost of reversing out these borrowings and refinancing them with standard Government debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9223/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The NTMA have informed me that Schuldschein were issued by Ireland in March 2009, as well as in June and September 2010 with original maturities ranging from fifteen to twenty years. They were issued as a means of diversifying the Exchequer’s sources of funding. They were issued at fixed interest rates, similar to standard fixed-rate Irish government bonds. The weighted average interest rate of 5.8% was in line with Irish government bond yields at that time.

For example, in March 2009 an Irish government bond maturing in 2020 was issued via auction at a yield of just over 5.8%. Similarly in September 2010, a bond maturing in 2018 was issued via auction at a yield of just over 6%. This was the last bond auction before Ireland entered the EU-IMF Programme of Financial Support in late 2010.

The first Schuldschein is due to mature in March 2024, and the last in September 2030. Schuldschein are, by their nature, generally held to maturity by the initial investor. In cases where they are sold, it will be at the full market price reflecting their fixed interest rate to maturity. This effectively creates a “break-cost” which would need to be considered if an opportunity for re-financing arose, as the associated costs could offset any potential interest savings. In

this sense, they are very similar to standard fixed-rate Irish government bonds.

### **Bond Markets**

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 151 of 13 February 2018, if banks (details supplied) have outstanding borrowings, not investment assets, in bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9224/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have been informed by AIB and PTSB that neither bank have outstanding borrowings in Schuldschein bonds.

### **National Development Plan**

72. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the parts of the national development plan that will assist development in County Longford. [9077/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The ten-year National Development Plan (NDP) has been put in place to underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) to support the development of all counties and regions, both urban and rural areas.

The NDP sets out an investment programme of €116 billion, aligned to the ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) detailed in the NPF which are critical to long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability in the period to 2040. Investment in urban and rural regeneration and development, drawing on two new Funds with total resources of €3 billion established for this purpose have the potential to have a transformative impact on both urban and rural areas and communities countrywide. The sharp focus in the NDP on measures to strengthen the all-island economy have a vital role to play in mitigating the risks and realising the opportunities created by the UK's exit from the EU. A core priority under the NPF which is supported by the investment plans in the NDP is the essential requirement to enhance and upgrade accessibility between urban centres of population and their regions, particularly in relation to road linkages to the North-West from Dublin which, the NDP notes, have been comparatively neglected until recently. Total funding of €8.8 billion is allocated to the NSO of strengthened rural economies and communities which is a cornerstone of NDP, including in relation to the delivery of the National Broadband Plan and significant investment in regional and local roads. The NDP also contains, as a priority, increased investment in public transport including train fleets. Chapter 5 of the NDP details as a fundamental objective of the Plan the investment planned in enhancing regional growth potential through an integrated programme of measures including, for example, regional sectoral clustering and the promotion of entrepreneurship on a regional basis. The Plan also highlights the importance of strengthening Ireland's international connectivity through continued investment in ports and airports, including under the Regional Airports Programme. It sets out the major programme of investment planned in the heritage area including in national parks and nature reserves. Continued investment over the ten years of the Plan to ensure the sustainable management of water resources is a further investment priority which is clearly relevant to all regions and counties. Finally the Plan sets out the investments planned in the areas of quality childcare, education and health services which are a defining characteristic of attractive, successful and competitive places.

Under the NPF and as set out in section 6.3 of the NDP the three Regional Assemblies are now tasked with co-ordinating, promoting and supporting the strategic planning and sustainable development of their regions, consistent with the objectives of the NPF through the prepa-

ration of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs). The RSEs for the Eastern and Midland Region is due to be completed by early 2019. This provides the opportunity for the priorities for County Longford, for example, those that are included in the existing Longford County Development Plan focused on sustainable growth and quality of life and on achievable employment and population growth within Longford and the Midlands region to be integrated into a regional investment plan which is expected to be a major driver of the implementation of the NPF.

### **Economic Growth**

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the growth forecasts for the economy upon which the national development plan 2018 to 2027 is based for each year in GDP and GNI up to 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9087/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Exchequer funding envelope of €91 billion detailed in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 is underpinned by a prudent and moderate scenario relating to the economy's potential growth over the period of the Plan. This ensures that the projected level of public capital investment over the ten years of the Plan is sustainable and affordable in the context of the projected fiscal capacity of the economy over that period.

As set out in section 3.2 of the NDP, the growth projections underpinning the Exchequer capital envelope contained in the Plan are based on GNI\*. As the Deputy is aware, the Economic Statistics Review Group has recommended the use of GNI\* when measuring the size of the Irish economy.

Macroeconomic projections adopted in the Plan for the period 2018-2021 are detailed in Annex 3 of the Economic and Fiscal Outlook for Budget 2018. As set out in the NDP, a potential or trend growth rate of 2% in volume terms is assumed over the period 2022 to 2027. This potential growth rate aligns with the most recent long-term growth projection from the European Commission for Ireland for the 2020s while being lower than the OECD long-term projection of almost 3% for that period. The prudent approach taken to the macro-economic and public capital investment framework in the plan is confirmed in terms of Ireland's historic growth performance averaging about 4½% over the whole of the period from 1966 – 2017. The 2% real growth assumption for 2022 to 2027 is supplemented with the conventional assumption that inflation will average 2% in line with the upper limit of the ECB's inflation target yielding a 4% nominal growth projection over the period.

### **National Development Plan**

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was consulted in relation to the €116 billion announced in the national development plan 2018 to 2027; if so, the details of the consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9088/18]

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the National Treasury Management Agency was consulted in relation to the €116 billion announced in the national development plan 2018 to 2027; if so, the details of the consultations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9225/18]

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the European Commission Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs was consulted in relation to the €116 billion announced in the national development plan 2018 to 2027; if so, the details of the consultations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9226/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 74, 79 and 80 together.

The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) is an independent statutory body whose purpose is to provide an independent assessment of official budgetary forecasts and proposed fiscal policy objectives. While my Department did not consult with the IFAC in relation to the National Development Plan, IFAC's broad support for the Government's proposed approach to increased public capital investment, in its November 2017 Fiscal Assessment Report, was noted, as follows:

*"Having been scaled back to a low base, public investment levels are expected to ramp up quite rapidly again, rising to levels that are among the highest in the EU under current plans. For instance, by 2021, public investment is planned to rise to 9.8 per cent of primary spending; 8.9 per cent of total revenue; and 3.5 per cent of GNI\*. Across all measures, this would be higher than present levels for countries such as France, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK as well as for the EU and Euro Area aggregates. Importantly, this is possible while still complying with the fiscal rules in later years. "*

*"A commitment to stick to a specified level of public investment as a share of GNI\* would be a sensible basis for fiscal policy over the medium term. If adhered to, this approach could help to prevent forced cuts to public investment in downturns and excessive expansions in investment during booms the preparation of the National Development Plan."*

My Department consulted with the National Treasury Management Agency in connection with a number of the roles performed by that Agency, including:

- NewERA, in relation to the commercial State sector element of the National Development Plan;
- the National Development Finance Agency, as a member of the Expert Group reviewing the potential role for PPPs in helping to deliver elements of the Plan; and
- the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, in relation to the role that the Fund could play in leveraging additional private investment to complement State-backed investment under the Plan.

In addition, of course, acting as the National Development Finance Agency, the National Treasury Management Agency is the statutory financial advisor to State authorities in respect of all public investment projects with a capital value over €20 million. The Agency will therefore continue to be consulted by the relevant Departments and Agencies in relation to all projects of this value that have been included in the National Development Plan, as required in accordance with the Public Spending Code.

With regard to the question of consultation with the European Commission Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs, the position is that the Government engages with that Directorate General on a regular basis, through the framework as established by the European Semester. This engagement has dealt with issues related to capital expenditure on a number of occasions in recent times:

- In July 2016 the European Commission made the Country Specific Recommendation that Ireland should prioritise government capital expenditure in public infrastructure, in particular

transport, water services and housing.

- In February 2017 the European Commission subsequently commented in the Country Report for Ireland that some progress had been made in prioritising government capital expenditure.

- In July 2017 the European Commission made the following Country Specific Recommendation:

*“Better target government expenditure, by prioritising public investment in transport, water services, and innovation in particular in support of SMEs. Enhance social infrastructure, including social housing and quality childcare; deliver an integrated package of activation policies to increase employment prospects of low-skilled people and to address low work intensity of households.”*

The National Development Plan seeks to address these issues by increasing investment levels in Ireland at a sustainable rate to amongst the highest in Europe and, very importantly, by ensuring that our infrastructure investment will be strictly guided by the National Planning Framework and its 10 National Strategic Outcomes.

### Office of Public Works Projects

75. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe for the planned extension to Longford town Garda station. [9133/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) and An Garda Síochána (AGS) are in the early stages of planning a refurbishment and upgrade of cells and custody facilities at Longford Garda Station.

It is not possible, at this stage, to provide a timeframe for delivery of the project but OPW and AGS will continue to work together to ensure that the project progresses as speedily as possible.

### National Development Plan

76. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent by the NDP information office for the NDP 2007 to 2013; the amount that was spent on public information and publicity campaigns for that NDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9168/18]

77. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a high level group was established in 2008 to manage communications for the NDP 2007 to 2013; if so, the name of that group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9169/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 77 together.

My Department is collating the information requested in the Deputy’s question from the file record which requires a review to be carried out on archived files and will respond to the Deputy directly in relation to this matter as soon as possible.

## Scoileanna Oileáin

78. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den an Aire Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe an bhfuarthas comhfhreagras a seoladh chuige faoi thionscadal i gContae Dhún na nGall; cén réadmhaoin atá i gceist atá faoi úinéireacht na Roinne (sonraí tugtha); cathain a eiseofar freagra scríofa; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [9219/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran) (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Is féidir liom a dhearbhu go bhfuair mo Roinn comhfhreagras maidir le iar Scoil Náisiúnta Inis Bó Finne, Contae Dhún na nGall. Scrúdóidh m'óifigh an cheist agus freagróidh said an comhfhreagras a luaithe is féidir.

*Questions Nos. 79 and 80 answered with Question No. 74.*

### Office of Public Works Projects

81. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to upgrade the barrage on the river Fergus in Clarecastle, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9081/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran) (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I am advised by the Office of Public Works that that office has no responsibility for the maintenance of the barrage on the River Fergus at Clarecastle, County Clare. Responsibility for the barrage rests with Clare County Council as part of the Fergus Drainage District.

The Council has advised that it has carried out maintenance works in recent years on the sluice doors on the barrage.

### Capital Expenditure Programme

82. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated capital expenditure by Department for each of the years 2023 to 2027 (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9093/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Annex 1 of the National Development Plan sets out capital ceilings for each Ministerial Vote Group for the five year period 2018 - 2022. As stated in section 3.6 of the Plan, these five-year ceilings will be maintained on a rolling basis for the period of the Plan, updated annually in the annual Estimates process to include a new fifth year. Capital ceilings by Ministerial Vote Group for the subsequent five year period 2023 - 2027 are not determined under the Plan on the same basis as the information contained in Annex 1. The allocation of funding included within capital ceilings for each Ministerial Vote Group to state agencies for the delivery of particular investment projects or programmes is a matter for the relevant Department and is not determined centrally by my Department.

Table 3.2 of the Plan sets out indicative funding allocations for the full period of the Plan on a thematic basis relating to each of the 10 National Strategic Outcomes for the National Planning Framework. As stated in section 3.6 of the Plan this funding reform was introduced to encourage Departments to develop investment proposals directly targeted at the achievement of NPF priorities and which contribute to the clear articulation of a strategic 10-year vision for

Ireland's public capital infrastructure. The identification of this destination can then guide and inform the design and implementation of their investment spending from 2018 onwards. The Deputy will note that table 3.2 also contains information on some of the main Strategic Investment Priorities, in respect of which indicative funding allocations have been provided under the Plan as well as the main Departments involved in delivering strategic priorities under each of the NSOs.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

83. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated capital expenditure by each State supported body in each of the years 2018 to 2027 under the national development plan 2018 to 2027, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9094/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Annex 1 of the National Development Plan sets out capital ceilings for each Ministerial Vote Group for the five year period 2018 - 2022. As stated in section 3.6 of the Plan, these five-year ceilings will be maintained on a rolling basis for the period of the Plan, updated annually in the annual Estimates process to include a new fifth year. Capital ceilings by Ministerial Vote Group for the subsequent five year period 2023 - 2027 are not determined under the Plan on the same basis as the information contained in Annex 1. The allocation of funding included within capital ceilings for each Ministerial Vote Group to state agencies for the delivery of particular investment projects or programmes is a matter for the relevant Department and is not determined centrally by my Department.

Table 3.2 of the Plan sets out indicative funding allocations for the full period of the Plan on a thematic basis relating to each of the 10 National Strategic Outcomes for the National Planning Framework. As stated in section 3.6 of the Plan this funding reform was introduced to encourage Departments to develop investment proposals directly targeted at the achievement of NPF priorities and which contribute to the clear articulation of a strategic 10-year vision for Ireland's public capital infrastructure. The identification of this destination can then guide and inform the design and implementation of their investment spending from 2018 onwards. The Deputy will note that table 3.2 also contains information on some of the main Strategic Investment Priorities, in respect of which indicative funding allocations have been provided under the Plan as well as the main Departments involved in delivering strategic priorities under each of the NSOs.

### **Minor Works Scheme Applications**

84. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works has received an application for works under the minor works scheme to prevent or mitigate against erosion in Ardfry, Renville and Oranmore from Galway County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9122/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Coastal erosion and coastal flooding issues are a matter for Local Authorities to investigate and address in the first instance and it is open to Galway County Council to carry out coastal protection and flood mitigation works using its own resources.

I have been advised by the Office of Public Works that no applications for projects at Ardfry, Renville or Oranmore have been received to date under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and

## Coastal Protection Scheme.

Funding of €1,144,800 was allocated to Galway County Council in 2014 for coastal protection repair works for infrastructure damaged during the storms of December, 2013 and January, 2014. Additional funding of €498,000 in this regard was allocated to the Council in 2015.

The initial allocation included funding of €12,000 for a project at Renville Seafront Walk, Oranmore and this funding was fully drawn-down.

Of the total funding of €1,642,800 provided to the Council in 2014 and 2015 for storm damage repairs, €1,504,556 has been expended to date. The Council has advised that it plans to complete outstanding works on a coastal project at Ardnagreevagh, Renville in 2018 at an estimated cost of €138,243, when the total allocation of funding will be expended.

### Minor Works Scheme Applications

85. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works has received an application for works from Galway County Council under the minor works scheme to prevent or mitigate against erosion at Leenane; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9123/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I have been advised by the Office of Public Works that an application was submitted by Galway County Council on 29 January 2018 under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for works at Leenane Village.

This application is currently being assessed and the Council will be advised of the outcome as soon as possible.

### Garda Stations

86. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 181 of 30 January 2018, the date on which the Office of Public Works plans to serve notice to vacate the premises of Stepside Garda station; if the assessment of Stepside Garda station has not commenced, the date it will be commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9145/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** My officials have advised me that the position outlined in Parliamentary Question 181 of 30 January 2018 remains unchanged.

In accordance with the contractual agreement in place with the guardian of the property, a 25 day notice to vacate is required.

The date on which the premises must be vacated will be determined when the works on the former station are assessed and a commencement date decided.

A brief of requirements has been requested from An Garda Síochána. Once received, the OPW will be in a position to determine the commencement date of refurbishment works.

87. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if work by the Office of Public Works requested by persons (details supplied) living near the Phoenix Park will be ensured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9163/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Commissioners of Public Works have raised the issue of ivy overhanging the Phoenix Park boundary wall at numbers one and two St Joseph's Cottages, Blackhorse Avenue with the Phoenix Park Special School.

I can confirm that these works are a matter for the Health Service Executive and they have been notified of the issue.

### **Office of Government Procurement**

88. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to ensure that companies that are awarded public works contracts do not employ persons on bogus self-employment contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9215/18]

89. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will request the Office of Government Procurement to update its awarding criteria for public works contracts to require tendering companies to guarantee that persons will not be employed on bogus self-employment, zero hours or if-and-when contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9216/18]

90. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the vetting process undertaken by the Office of Government Procurement as part of the public contract tendering processes to ensure that persons are not employed on bogus self-employment, zero hours or if-and-when contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9217/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 to 90, inclusive, together.

Public procurement is the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. National rules governing public procurement must comply with the relevant EU, WTO and national legal requirements and obligations. The aim of European and national rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

In this regard, public procurement rules include provisions that allow Member States to require a contractor to comply with EU and National legislation on the protection of labour rights. As a consequence public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts and applicants are required to make declarations in relation to their financial standing, their legal standing and in relation to payment of taxes and social contributions.

Contracting authorities may also require applicants for public contracts to declare that they have not breached their obligations in the fields of environmental, social and labour law established by Union law, national law, collective agreements or by the international environmental, social and labour law provisions listed in Annex X of 2014/24/EU.

These requirements are set out in the template documents used in tendering for goods and services which have been developed by the Office of Government Procurement in conjunction

with the Office of the Attorney General and the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

The management of a tendering process for a public contract is a matter for each contracting authority. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to assess that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

Public bodies are required to reject a tender where it can be established that it is abnormally low because it does not meet with the obligations imposed by environmental, social and labour law.

Once awarded, the conditions of the public works contracts require the contractor to certify compliance with employment law, to maintain records of all those employed on the site, regardless of whether they are employees of the contractor or their subcontractors, and the hours worked by them. Where requested, the contractor must also provide details of the payments made to those employed on the site. Where the contractor fails to comply with their obligations under the contract or employment law, deductions may be made from payments due under the contract until the situation is rectified.

It is important to note that employment law and its enforcement, in both public and private contracts, is a matter for the relevant State authorities, including the Workplace Relations Commission and the Departments of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

### **Schools Establishment**

91. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to progress the opening of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9044/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware, I have announced new plans aimed at accelerating the provision of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment to reach 400 such schools by 2030.

I would point out that the previous model of divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (10 since 2013). I believe that the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified (of which Killarney is one), in 2018 and beyond.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

92. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the period of time which a person can receive a SUSI grant as a postgraduate (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9100/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Under the Student Grant Scheme grant aid for postgraduate study is limited to a maximum of four years in total. Account

is taken of all previous attendance and attainment at postgraduate level when considering grant aid entitlement for postgraduate study, regardless of whether a person previously received a grant or not.

I understand that the person to which the Deputy refers has utilised two years to achieve her master's degree and is now pursuing a four year Ph.D. As this person has already studied for two years at postgraduate level, he/she will only be eligible to be considered for a further two years funding at postgraduate level. *Question No. 93 withdrawn.*

### **Departmental Staff Data**

94. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of officials and advisors that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9153/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** One advisor and one official from the Department of Education and Skills travelled to the launch of the NDP and NPF in Sligo on 16 February. The costs of same will be known once travel claims have been submitted and processed.

### **Departmental Functions**

95. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the delay in issuing P60s to teachers in view of the fact that P60s must be issued within six weeks of the end of the year and that the deadline for 2017 was 15 February 2018; if P60s are being issued on time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9218/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** There are approximately one hundred and thirty thousand staff paid on payrolls operated by my Department who will receive a P60 for 2017. The Deputy will appreciate that there are a number of processes that must be completed prior to the issue of the P60s. My Department is making arrangements to have the P60s issued as soon as possible.

### **School Enrolments**

96. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to issue a directive on the effective implementation of the right to opt out of religious instruction schools under a religious ethos; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9234/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Under the Constitution and in accordance with Section 30 of the Education Act 1998, parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes if they so wish.

I believe that difficulties could be avoided if, from the outset, a school's arrangements for those students who do not wish to attend religious instruction are made clear to parents. In that regard, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to publish new school admissions legislation taking into account current draft proposals.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill includes a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do

not wish to attend religious instruction. I believe this is an important measure which will help ensure transparency from the outset as to how a school will uphold the rights of parents in this regard.

Furthermore another crucial way of dealing with this issue is to provide additional choice to parents and in this regard the Programme for Government includes a commitment to increasing the rate of provision of multi-denominational schools reaching 400 by 2030.

This is not to say that schools are currently doing nothing when they receive such requests from parents or that there is no advice for schools available. The follow-up paper to the Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector which was published in 2014 outlines good practice and options for promoting diversity in all schools. The paper gives an overview of different types of arrangements that schools have put in place to facilitate those pupils who wish to opt-out of religious education.

The paper encourages school authorities to consider their policies and practices and to review whether they are taking the steps necessary to welcome all pupils and make them feel included. I understand that in the case of catholic schools, the Catholic Schools Partnership subsequently published guidelines for catholic schools in relation to the inclusion of all pupils and that this also contains suggestions on how such schools can manage the “opt-out” of religious education.

These are important steps, which alongside the circular I recently published for state multi-denominational schools, help to inform parents in an open and transparent way how their requests to have their children opt out of religious instruction are handled by schools.

### **Housing Management Companies**

97. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ensure property management fees are not allowed to spiral out of control; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that management fees have significantly increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9042/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The position is that the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 was enacted with the primary purposes of reforming the law relating to the ownership and management of common areas of multi-unit developments and facilitating the fair, efficient and effective management of owners’ management companies (OMCs). These are companies registered under the Companies Acts, the members of which are the owners of residential units within the development and which are established for the purposes of ownership and management of the common areas.

The 2011 Act contains provisions relating to such matters as:

- the transfer of common areas to the OMCs (sections 4 and 5);
- the voting rights of members of OMCs (sections 14 and 15);
- the provision of annual reports by OMCs to members (section 17);
- arrangements for the holding of annual meetings to approve annual service charges (section 18);
- the establishment of a sinking fund to cover refurbishment outlays (section 19);

- arrangements for the making of House Rules (section 23); and
- the establishment of a court-based dispute resolution process (section 24).

The Act also contains provisions which encourage the resolution of disputes that may arise between parties by means of mediation rather than recourse to court proceedings.

In relation to annual service charges I should point out that it is a matter for each individual OMC to determine the amount of the service charge on an annual basis. Section 18 of the Act requires OMCs to establish and maintain a scheme of annual service charges from which they may discharge expenditure incurred on the provision of common or shared services to the owners and occupiers of residential units in the development, including insurance, waste management and security services. The Act sets out clearly that the service charge must be calculated on a transparent basis, and be equitably apportioned between the residential unit owners. In order to ensure transparency and accountability, both the annual service charge and the services to be provided must be approved by a general meeting of the members of the OMC.

### **Residency Permits**

98. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of persons (details supplied) that wish to remain permanently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9025/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it wrote to the legal representatives of the person concerned on 15 February 2018 in connection with an application for a residence card pursuant to the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015.

I am further advised that INIS requested the person concerned to submit evidence of the EU citizen's current activities in this State within 10 working days. I understand that INIS expects to issue a decision on the application for a residence card in early March 2018 based on the information available at that stage.

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

### **Independent Review Mechanism**

99. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos 147 and 148 of 15 February 2018, the exact extension provided in each of these statutory inquiries in view of the fact that some have not yet commenced; and his views on whether they will be able to complete their task in a timely fashion. [9033/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Firstly I want to say, contrary to the Deputy's assertion, that work has been ongoing in relation to all five of the inquiries since the middle of last year. These inquiries were established by Orders made by my predecessor on 15 May 2017. Officials from my Department subsequently met with the retired judges

appointed to conduct the Inquiries to provide them with all relevant documentation held by the Department and a considerable amount of work has been done since then.

In respect of three Inquiries, an extension until 31 March 2018 has been granted for the delivery of final reports. In the cases of the two remaining Inquiries, extensions have been granted until 30 June 2018. These extensions have been granted in order to afford to the Inquirers adequate opportunity to consider fully all matters relevant to their terms of reference.

As I advised the Deputy in my reply to question 147 of 15 February 2018, I believe that it is in the interests of all involved that the inquiries be given sufficient time to examine and report on the issues in question. As inquiries progress, additional information or documentation can come to light and this can impact on the time required to fully inquire into the matters within the ambit of each inquiry.

### **Naturalisation Certificates**

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); if the appropriate interim stamp can be facilitated pending a decision with particular reference to the health circumstances of the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9036/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 12 February 2018. Processing of this application is on-going, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The records indicate that the current permission to reside in the State granted to the person concerned is due to expire on 4 March 2018. It is up to the person concerned to seek permission to remain beyond the expiry of her current permission. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

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.

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.

### **General Data Protection Regulation**

101. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if administrative

finances can be imposed on general practitioners acting in the course of their work if section 136 of the Data Protection Bill 2018 is enacted in legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9054/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The position is that Article 83 of the General Data Protection Regulation provides for the possible imposition of administrative fines on data controllers in cases in which its provisions have been infringed. Paragraph 7 of that Article provides that it is a matter for each Member State to decide whether, and to what extent, administrative fines may be imposed on public authorities and bodies. Section 136 of the Data Protection Bill 2018 provides that an administrative fine may be imposed on a data controller that is a public authority or body only where it is acting as an undertaking within the meaning of the Competition Act 2002.

The GDPR does not provide for exemptions from the administrative fine provisions for other categories of data controllers, such as health practitioners. A decision on whether or not to impose an administrative fine in respect of an individual case will be a matter for the

Data Protection Commission, having given due regard to the mitigating and aggravating factors set out in paragraph 2 of Article 83.

### **Domestic Violence Policy**

102. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the outstanding actions required for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention; the expected timeframe for completion of those actions; the reason for the delay in ratifying the Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9056/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I and my Government colleagues are totally committed to tackling violence against women and domestic violence. The Programme for Government commits to full implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

The actions necessary to ratify the Istanbul Convention are contained in the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021, published in January, 2016.

The implementation of most of these actions is underway including public sector training/education by a range of State agencies, the development of a Risk Assessment Matrix by An Garda Síochána, and commissioning of national helpline services to respond to issues of domestic and sexual violence.

The outstanding actions are legislative and require delivery of two pieces of legislation:

i) The Domestic Violence Bill which was published on 3 February 2017. The Bill has passed all stages in the Seanad and Second Stage in the Dáil. Committee stage is expected to commence shortly in the Dáil. It is hoped that this Bill will be enacted in the near future. The enactment of this legislation is key to advancing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention as its enactment will deliver four of the actions required under the Convention.

iii) The one remaining legislative action is the enactment of legislation for extraterritorial jurisdiction. Work on this action is underway and it is anticipated that this legislation will be published in the first half of 2018.

When the required legislative actions are implemented, Ireland will be in a position to ratify

the Convention.

### **Property Valuations**

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the location of the public property arbitrator has been identified; if it is possible to make contact by phone, letter or email; if its work programme has been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9068/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, when the State compulsorily acquires land for public purposes and there is a dispute between the vendor and the purchaser regarding the amount of compensation which should be paid, the vendor may apply to the Land Values Reference Committee (comprising the Chief Justice, the President of the High Court and the President of the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland) for the appointment of a Property Arbitrator to arbitrate on the amount to be paid. Property Arbitrators are appointed under section 2(1) of the Property Values (Arbitration and Appeals) Act, 1960 by the Land Values Reference Committee and all property arbitrations are required by law to be held in public.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have made enquiries and the Courts Service has informed me that there is currently one full-time property arbitrator, Mr. Michael Neary, whose contact details are publicly available as follows: Michael Neary, Property Arbitrator, 34 Trees Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

The Courts Service has also informed me that Mr. Neary is a designated public official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 in accordance with section 6(4) of the Act.

Seven temporary part-time arbitrators are available to be nominated to act in cases in which the Property Arbitrator is unable to act.

Neither my Department nor the Courts Service has any function in relation to the work programme of Property Arbitrators who are appointed by the Land Values Reference Committee.

### **Immigration Policy**

104. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will ensure a person (details supplied) can return for a short period to their home country and subsequently re-enter the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9099/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in the case of a person who has not yet had a final decision made in their case to remain in the State, it is open to the person concerned to avail of the option of voluntary return. This option, if taken up, would leave it open to the person concerned to apply to return to this State at a future date should they establish a valid basis for doing so.

Alternatively, as with all persons who have no valid permission to remain in the State, their case will be considered under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). The outcome of this process is either a Deportation Order is issued or a permission to remain is granted by the Minister. It is not possible to pre-empt the outcome of this process and it is not possible for someone to leave and legally re-enter the State while their case is under consideration.

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.

### **Brexit Issues**

105. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of meetings he has held with officials from An Garda Síochána in relation to preparing for a hard border post-Brexit; the dates of those meetings; the attendees at those meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9109/18]

106. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if budgetary provision has been made for An Garda Síochána to prepare for a hard border post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9110/18]

107. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if plans have been put in place for deployment of additional gardaí to the Border counties in preparation for a hard border post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9111/18]

108. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has prepared a paper in relation to the additional costs for An Garda Síochána of a hard border post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9112/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 to 108, inclusive, together.

Contingency planning at both a domestic and an EU level is focused on three areas: preparing for a no-deal scenario or so-called "disorderly Brexit"; preparing for a transition period based on the "status quo"; and preparing for the future EU-UK relationship.

While the outcome of the December European Council and the move on to Phase 2 has lessened the likelihood of a disorderly Brexit, very detailed work on a no-deal or worst-case-scenario is advancing intensively through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade. This work is also informed by ongoing stakeholder engagement. Separately, a new preparedness unit in the Commission is considering EU-level responses.

All this work provides a baseline scenario for the policies and sectors impacted, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations. In this regard, it is welcome that the direction of travel is now firmly towards achieving a "status quo" transition period. Agreement on a "status quo" transition will provide certainty to individuals and businesses while also aiming to avoid any cliff edge effects between the UK leaving the EU and a future relationship agreement coming into force. The period will provide time for businesses and citizenship, as well as Government agencies, to prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the EU based on the outcome of the negotiations on the framework for the EU's future relationship with the UK. In this respect, the expectation is that the European Council will adopt additional Guidelines at its meeting on 22-23 March 2018 on the framework for the future EU-UK relationship. These guidelines – as well as further clarity on the UK position, which has been sought by the European Council - will provide a clearer picture of the direction of travel in the negotiations.

In relation to the question of the border, the Common Travel Area is an important feature of the close relationship between Ireland and the UK with long-established benefits for trade and tourism between our two countries. Both the Irish and UK Governments have publicly declared their commitment to maintaining the CTA and to ensuring no return to a so-called 'hard border' on the island of Ireland. The UK's commitment to avoiding a hard border was restated as part of the agreement to move to phase 2 of the Brexit negotiations in December. The Government's commitment to that outcome could not be clearer.

An extensive programme of engagement has been put in place to support this strategic objective. The importance of the CTA has been highlighted through political and diplomatic engagement with other Member States. There is ongoing engagement with EU institutions and there is regular contact with the European Commission negotiating team on the UK exit from the EU, including in relation to the specific question of the Common Travel Area.

The practical impact of Brexit on the operation of the CTA is being considered between officials of my Department and the UK Home Office, including at meetings of the Common Travel Area Forum jointly chaired by the Director General of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and his UK counterpart. An Garda Síochána is represented at a senior level at these meetings. There is a shared understanding that the maintenance of the CTA and the avoidance of a hard border is a priority strategic objective for both countries.

The Government's contingency planning continues to be firmly grounded in the extensive work and outreach that has already been undertaken by individual Departments and agencies, as well as by stakeholder organisations, academics and others. This includes ongoing engagement by my Department with the Garda authorities in relation to the implications of UK exit. I want to emphasise that it is the Government's intention that the same border arrangements as currently apply on the island of Ireland will continue in the future. There is already a clear consensus that the Common Travel Area would continue so that the movement of people, a matter of primary concern for my Department and An Garda Síochána, should not be affected. As would be the case for any changes in policy or practice across any public policy area, in the event that the final shape of Brexit requires changes in the deployment of policing resources then those changes will be implemented by the appropriate authorities and any budgetary provision made in the context of the Estimates process.

### **Garda Vetting**

109. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all convictions, including driving offences, are included in the offences reported on in circumstances in which Garda clearance is sought for working with children and the elderly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9121/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Employment vetting is carried out by Garda National Vetting Bureau primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016, the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 and other applicable law. The primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by An Garda Síochána is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults.

In accordance with the requirements of these Acts, An Garda Síochána will establish whether there is any criminal record or specified information relating to the person who is the subject of the application for vetting and disclose the details of those convictions as appropriate.

In accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016, the disclosure of certain convictions is not required in certain circumstances and specific provision is made in respect of offences under the Road Traffic Acts by section 21 of the 2016 Act.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

110. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of plans for Ballymahon Garda station. [9134/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

However, I am informed by the Garda authorities that local Garda management is currently developing a brief of requirements for the station having regard to developments in the area such as the proposed Center Parcs. In addition, I understand that An Garda Síochána is also engaging with the OPW with a view to the provision of additional locker facilities in the station.

Any works that are required at the station will be considered by the Commissioner in the context of the funding available to meet overall Garda accommodation requirements in the State, including, in particular, the Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

111. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding to improve working conditions in Castlepollard Garda station will be approved in view of the condition of the station. [9135/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

However, I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána is liaising with OPW in relation to certain issues at the station.

### **Protected Disclosures**

112. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the internal audit unit of his Department did not investigate a protected disclosure (details supplied) but instead referred it back to the Irish Prison Service in contravention of the protected disclosures policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9166/18]

113. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied that he has fulfilled his obligations in terms of addressing the concerns of a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9167/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 and 113 together.

The case to which the Deputy refers was dealt with in accordance with the Prison Service Protected Disclosure policy in place, including an external review, on foot of which various actions were taken.

Subsequent to this, the Officer in question took proceedings in the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). The Commission will make its determination on the matters raised in due course. I am conscious of the proceedings currently taking place and that the WRC should be allowed the necessary time to make an independent determination on the matter.

Insofar as the correspondence of September 2017 is concerned, the Prison Service Protected Disclosures recipient (Head of the Department's Internal Audit Unit) informed the Officer that it was open to him to have the matters raised in his correspondence considered alongside the concerns now before the Workplace Relations Commission. The Protected Disclosures recipient sought and received permission from the Officer to communicate the concerns raised in the correspondence to the Director General of the Prison Service, noting in that correspondence the importance of ensuring that workers who make protected disclosures are not penalised in any manner.

The Officer chose not to bring the issues raised in correspondence of September 2017 before the WRC. Subsequently, and on the direction of the Protected Disclosures recipient, my Department has engaged an independent external legal firm to independently examine the complaints set out in the letter of September 2017. The Officer has been informed that this process is underway.

### **Parental Leave**

114. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person that takes parental leave in the form of one day per week is entitled to retain that pattern of work and leave (details supplied); and his plans to provide for such an entitlement. [9212/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will be aware, Parental Leave is provided for in the Parental Leave Act 1998, as amended by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006, and further regulated by the European Union (EU) Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU which was transposed into Irish Law on 8 March 2013.

Section 7 of the Parental Leave Act 1998 stipulates that Parental Leave may consist of a continuous period of weeks or, with the agreement of the employer, one or more days or hours, or a combination of same, on or during which, but for the leave, the employee would be working in the employment concerned.

The Act does not provide for an employee to continue with a daily or hourly pattern of parental leave once the agreement of the employer to the arrangement is withdrawn.

115. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 132 of 18 January 2018, the reason for the delay in the issuing of the response; when the requested information will be supplied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9227/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I explained in my response to the Deputy on 18 January 2018 that it was not possible in the timeframe allowed to compile the information requested.

GSOC were asked for additional information to enable me to reply fully to the Deputy's question. Subsequently GSOC undertook to respond directly to the Deputy when the information was compiled.

I am advised that GSOC wrote to the Deputy on 9 February 2018 advising her that they would issue her directly with a detailed reply by 23 February 2018. GSOC explained to the Deputy that a significant amount of effort was required to examine their archives in order to retrieve relevant material.

However, I have now been informed by GSOC that they expect to be able to provide a detailed reply to the Deputy during the week commencing 26 February 2018. As the Deputy will appreciate, the collection and compilation of records sought from 2005 is onerous and time consuming given that the request covers periods before GSOC became fully operational.

### **Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Staff**

116. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of the request from GSOC for 12 additional staff forwarded to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; the number of posts which were sought in this request; and if it accurately reflected the number of posts sought by GSOC. [9228/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In November 2016 GSOC submitted a proposal to my Department for the creation of a designated unit to deal with protected disclosures. The proposal requested funding for a separate office within GSOC and for 12 new staff. At that time, GSOC had 10 protected disclosures on hand.

My Department liaised with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) in relation to the request. Staff from my Department met with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and provided them with a copy of the GSOC proposal. Subsequent to that meeting the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform sought specific information in relation to existing arrangements/staffing ratios, etc., which my Department requested from GSOC.

While awaiting this information, my Department sought immediate sanction for 5 staff to get the new unit up and running. In May 2017, sanction was obtained from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for the initial approval of 5 staff. It was clearly communicated to GSOC that the provision of further staff could be considered in the context of the 2018 Budget by which time the impact of the establishment of the unit and the adequacy of the 5 staff could be assessed. There was a clear commitment on the part of my Department at all times, that GSOC could re-engage on the issue as the situation developed and that the door was open to more resources being made available for the new unit based on further information being provided and experience of the operation of the new unit.

Unfortunately, it has taken far longer than my Department envisaged at the time, for the 5 staff to be recruited and as of now, GSOC has not yet succeeded in recruiting all the staff sanc-

tioned in May 2017.

Finally, the Deputy may be interested to know that I met with the Chair of GSOC last September and discussed with her, among other things, the resourcing of GSOC. I invited her to set out for me her best assessment of the overall resource requirements to provide the level of service that complainants, and all those interested in the effective and efficient investigation of complaints against members of An Garda Síochána, expect and deserve. I am pleased to say that I have, this week, received a detailed business case for additional resources from GSOC and I will ensure that it is dealt with expeditiously. It is in no-one's interest that there is any perception that GSOC cannot fulfil its statutory mandate for want of resources and I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure that GSOC has the resources it requires.

### **Alcohol Sales**

117. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of full and part public alcohol licences issued to private members clubs in the past three years; the establishments (details supplied) in receipt of a licence to sell alcohol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9231/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I understand the Deputy's question to relate to private members clubs that operate on the basis of the Registration of Clubs Acts 1904 to 2008. Those Acts provide for the grant and renewal of a certification of registration by the courts for a bona fide club. The Registration of Clubs Acts permit the sale of intoxicating liquor to members of the club and also to members of the public in certain defined circumstances.

A register of clubs is kept by the Registrar of Clubs i.e. the District Court clerk of the court area in which the club premises is situated. The register contains details of the date of granting of the certificate of registration, whether the certificate was granted for the first time or on renewal, the address of the club, the names and addresses of the officials and the committee of management or governing body of the club and whether the club is tenant or the proprietor and occupier of the premises.

Any person is permitted to inspect this register and a copy of the club rules on payment of the relevant fee.

I am advised by the Courts Service that court statistics are not compiled in such a way as to provide details of the individual clubs which are certified. This information could only be obtained by the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of staff time. I have been advised that 453 club certificates were granted in 2015, 561 in 2016 and 462 in 2017.

### **Immigration Status**

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied) will be fully investigated with a view to updating stamp 4; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9247/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to the request from the person concerned for an update on their status, a representative of the INIS will be writing to the person concerned in order to resolve this matter.

Responsibility for the registration process referred to is vested in the Garda National Immigration Bureau, and a Garda update on this matter and on this person's registration will be sought.

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

### **Residency Permits**

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given on compassionate grounds to facilitate temporary residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9248/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that from the limited information provided by the Deputy it is not possible to identify either of the persons concerned and therefore it is not possible to adequately respond to this question.

It would appear that the persons concerned may never have had permission to remain in the State. If it is the case that the persons concerned have not engaged with the immigration service already then they should do so as soon as possible.

In this regard and to allow for a full examination of their individual circumstances, they should be advised to write directly to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 supplying the following documentation in relation to themselves, and if applicable, in relation to any spouse or children that might be currently in the State.

1. Full copy of their passport/s
2. Copy of their GNIB card/s
3. Copy of marriage certificate (if applicable)
4. Brief outline of their history in the State to include when and where they entered the State as well as a brief outline of their current circumstances.
5. Their current address.

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.

### **Immigration Status**

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which appropriate immigration stamp status may be offered to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9249/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I refer the Deputy to my previous response to Parliamentary Question No. 3891/18 on 25 January 2018, and thank him for providing some additional details as then requested. However, despite this, I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is still not possible to identify the person concerned.

From the details provided, it would appear that the person in question may never have had permission to remain in the State. If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already they should do so as soon as possible.

In this regard and to allow for a full examination of their circumstances, the person concerned should be advised to write directly to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 supplying the following documentation in relation to themselves, and as applicable, in relation to any spouse or children that might be currently in the State.

1. Full copy of their passport/s
2. Copy of their GNIB card/s
3. Copy of marriage certificate (if applicable)
4. Brief outline of their history in the State to include when and where they entered the State as well as a brief outline of their current circumstances.
5. Their current address.

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.

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when, on the basis of stamps 3 and 4 to date, a person (details supplied) is likely to be eligible to apply for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9250/18]

**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 an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the persons referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie). The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

### **Residency Permits**

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, following the provision of DNA evidence in the case of a person (details supplied), they are eligible to qualify for stamp 4 or long term residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9251/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned made an application for a right of residency accompanied by a right to work based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child and which was received in the Department on 3 October 2017.

On 3 November 2017 the person concerned was requested to provide DNA evidence to satisfy INIS as to the parentage of the Irish citizen child. The results of the DNA test have now been received and INIS will be in contact with the applicant in due course.

In order to make an application for Long Term Residency in the State the person concerned must have been legally resident in the State for a minimum of 5 years (i.e. 60 months) on work permit/work authorisation/working visa conditions.

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.

### **Immigration Status**

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the renewal of a stamp 4 can be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9252/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application was received from the person concerned and acknowledged on 22 November 2017. INIS subsequently contacted this person on 20 February 2018 seeking documentary evidence supporting their application. The application will be considered further upon receipt of all the required

documentation.

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 Applications**

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to an application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9253/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question made an application for family reunification under the provisions of the Refugee Act 1996 in January 2015. The case has been finalised and a decision letter issued to the applicant on 6 November 2015. There is no record of any current application for family reunification from the person concerned.

It is open to Irish citizens and those outside the International Protection process to apply for family reunification under the Non-EEA Policy Document on Family Reunification, which is available on the INIS website, [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

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.

### **Visa Applications**

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a spousal visa or appropriate document will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9256/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a decision has been made on this application, and the applicant has been advised accordingly.

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, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to [visamail@justice.ie](mailto:visamail@justice.ie).

### **Immigration Status**

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if residency status will be upgraded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9257/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I refer the Deputy to my response to his Parliamentary Question No. 118 of 7 December 2017. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the situation remains unchanged.

After full consideration of this case, in correspondence, dated 26 September 2017, INIS wrote to the person concerned offering them temporary and limited immigration permission to remain in the State on Stamp 0 conditions for one year as a person of independent means. On 23 November 2017, the person concerned wrote to INIS via the Deputy stating that Stamp 0 was insufficient to meet their needs.

In correspondence, dated 23 November 2017, INIS wrote back to the person concerned clarifying that they do not qualify for any other permission to remain in the State other than Stamp 0 permission. Enclosed with this letter, also dated 23 November 2017, was a second letter offering the person concerned limited immigration permission to remain in the State on Stamp 0 conditions for one year as a person of independent means. INIS await a response to this second letter of offer.

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.

### **Immigration Status**

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) will be considered for residency status upgrade in the short and medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9258/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a letter issued to the person concerned on 17 January 2018 confirming that the application for a residence card pursuant to the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 has been approved. I am further advised that the person concerned has been granted permission to remain in this state under Stamp 4 EUFam conditions for a period of five years.

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.

## **Immigration Status**

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a stamp 4 or similar status will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied); his views on whether a work permit is an appropriate or another solution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9259/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that from the limited details provided it is not possible to identify the person concerned and therefore its not possible to adequately respond to this question.

It would appear that the person in question may never have had permission to remain in the State. If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already they should do so as soon as possible.

In this regard and to allow for a full examination of their circumstances, they should be advised to write directly to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 supplying the following documentation in relation to themselves, and if applicable, in relation to any spouse or children that might be currently in the State.

1. Full copy of their passport/s
2. Copy of their GNIB card/s
3. Copy of marriage certificate (if applicable)
4. Brief outline of their history in the State to include when and where they entered the State as well as a brief outline of their current circumstances.
5. Their current address.

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.

## **Patient Transfers**

129. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if the patient transfer of a person (details supplied) from Naas General Hospital to Tallaght Hospital will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9024/18]

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

## **Psychological Assessments Waiting Times**

130. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being made to reduce the

waiting time for referrals to the child and adolescent primary care psychology service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9028/18]

145. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting a community based primary care psychology appointment; the number of those children that suffer from an eating disorder; the number awaiting an appointment more than three, six, 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9131/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 145 together.

In recognition of the particular need to address access to primary care-based counselling services for under 18s, the Government has prioritised investment in this area. The HSE's National Service Plan 2016 provided an additional €5m for psychology for children with a focus on enhanced counselling interventions for children and adolescents. Recruitment of these posts, which includes a mix of psychologists and psychology assistants has commenced on a nationwide basis.

I have asked the HSE to revert to the Deputies in relation to the detailed service issues, including the number of children waiting for an appointment.

### **Health Services Appeals**

131. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a decision on an appeal for ancillary State support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9031/18]

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

### **Health Services**

132. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the reason the service of a chiropodist attending persons with diabetes in County Roscommon has ceased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9037/18]

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

### **Health Services Provision**

133. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of times a year persons with diabetes are entitled to attend a chiropodist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9038/18]

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

### **Health Services Data**

134. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have received treatment in the chiropodist clinic in County Roscommon in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9039/18]

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

### **HSE Funding**

135. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE is paying for a chiropodist surgery for one day a week in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9040/18]

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

### **Health Services Provision**

136. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE is only providing a surgery one day a week to the chiropodist in County Roscommon; if so, when this will be increased to a fulltime service of five days per week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9041/18]

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

### **Primary Care Centres**

137. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide dedicated dietetic services at the Ballyheigue primary care centre; when they will be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9047/18]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Administration**

138. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9063/18]

**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 de-

veloped to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Hospital Equipment**

139. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that community groups in an area (details supplied) are raising funds to purchase an additional MRI scanner for the Midlands Regional Hospital Mullingar; if the HSE can supply the equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9070/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Deputy's question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

140. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason versatis pain relief patches have been withdrawn from vulnerable persons; and his plans to put in place a suitable replacement treatment on the medical card scheme [9073/18]

141. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a required medical product will be supplied to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9080/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 141 together.

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 a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plasters are licensed for the localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults. This is the only licensed use for the patch in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010.

When the plasters were first introduced, the budget impact was low, because of the specific indication for which they are licensed. It was therefore a cause of clinical concern that, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where, as a nation, we were using more plasters than the entire UK National Health Service, with ten times our population.

When a treatment is intended for a small group of patients, and evidence suggests that it is being used for many times that number, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review its use. In 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing had been for the licensed indication.

Following the clinical review, and in the interest of ensuring appropriate patient care, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches from 1 September 2017. This process supports their appropriate use, ensuring that post-shingles patients continue to receive this treatment.

Under the new arrangements, all patients receiving lidocaine plasters for the licensed indication, shingles, were automatically approved on the HSE system. All of these patients continue to receive the treatment under the community schemes.

Non-shingles patients were given a three month grace period, in which their GP could move them to other treatments or apply for continued reimbursement. However, from 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients were no longer automatically reimbursed under the community drugs schemes.

In order for non-shingles patients to receive the patch through the community schemes, their GP must apply online for continued reimbursement approval. If an application is refused, the GP may appeal, making a clinical case for the patient. The HSE advises that the turnaround time for applications is three working days and for appeals it is five days.

As of 16 February, approximately 1,500 post-shingles patients have been approved, and the plaster is being provided to those patients in the normal manner.

Another 4784 non-shingles patients were registered by their GP, and 14% of these patients, 670 people, have been approved. In addition, 284 online appeals have been made, including patients who were never registered, and over 65% of these patients have been approved.

Over 2300 patients are now approved for the plaster in the drug schemes, with more than 850, over one third, approved for use other than post-shingles pain, based on the clinical case made by the GP.

It is clear that this new process supports appropriate use and prescribing and both post-shingles patients and other appropriate cases can continue to be treated with lidocaine plasters.

The introduction of the new approval system was flagged in August 2017, when details of the proposed changes were circulated by the HSE to prescribers and pharmacies. This advice has been re-issued in the last week, and information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE Medicines Management Programme website. (<http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclin-prog/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.

### **Emergency Departments**

142. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if a new emergency department will be provided at Beaumont hospital, Dublin 9 (details supplied); when construction of this new building will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9083/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Development Plan provides for a large number of Health developments across the country, including both national programmes and individual projects, across acute, primary and social care. Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue. As to be expected with a ten year plan,

many proposals are at an early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning design and tender before a firm timeline or funding required can be established.

The Health Service Executive has informed my Department that an EU procurement process, to progress the selection and appointment of a design team for the new emergency department at Beaumont Hospital, will be progressed in 2018.

### **Commissions of Investigation**

143. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date on the inquiry into the care of a person (details supplied) [9108/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government established the Farrelly Commission by SI 96 of 2017 on 21 March 2017. The Chair and Sole member of the Commission is Marjorie Farrelly Senior Counsel.

The Commission commenced its investigations on 15 May 2017, with an interim report to be completed within six months and a final report on Phase 1 of its investigations within 12 months of commencing work.

An interim Report was submitted to the Minister for Health in November 2017.

### **Mental Health Services Funding**

144. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if the proceeds from the sale of St Senan's Hospital, Enniscorthy, County Wexford, will be invested in mental health services in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9128/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Government policy as set out in 'A Vision for Change' is that proceeds from the sale of older mental health assets, such as St. Senan's, will be reinvested in new developments within mental health.

I understand new replacement accommodation has already been delivered for all the mental health care services provided from St Senan's and the delivery of health services has been discontinued at the St Senan's site.

The use of the sales proceeds from the disposal of St. Senan's will be subject to sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It would be intended that the proceeds of the sale of this property will be invested in much needed mental health facilities in addition to the very significant Exchequer funding required to maintain and improve health infrastructure.

*Question No. 145 answered with Question No. 130.*

### **Departmental Staff Data**

146. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of officials and advisors that travelled from his department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9154/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** No officials from my Department travelled to the Project Ireland 2040 launch in Sligo. One advisor travelled with me on the day. No costs

were incurred by my Department.

### **Health Services Funding**

147. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the financial provision that has been made towards the necessary upgrading and expansion of a health facility (details supplied); if specific provision is made in the 2040 capital plan for such developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9160/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion for Health capital developments across the country.

As is to be expected with a ten-year plan, many proposals are at an early stage and - as with all capital development proposals - will require further appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm timeline or funding requirement can be established.

It is important to note that the NDP does not include funding allocations for individual programmes, projects or locations.

Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue.

### **Health Services Funding**

148. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if specific provision is made in the 2040 capital plan for upgrading of a health facility (details supplied); the commencement date for such upgrading; the estimated cost of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9161/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** On the 16 February 2018, the Government published the National Development Plan which outlines the capital investment programme for the next ten years, 2018 to 2027. The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector.

It is important to recognise that this is a long-term plan which provides for a large number of Health developments across the country. With this unprecedented capital investment in the Health services, we must ensure that we carefully plan the use of this capital funding. Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue to completion. Appraisal and planning across all Community Healthcare Organisations and Hospital Groups, in line with health strategies and demographic needs, will inform the selection of projects and programmes for improvements in health infrastructure, equipment and additional health service capacity.

My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to you in relation to the current position regarding capital developments at Breffni Care Nursing Unit, Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan.

### **Hospital Charges**

149. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is fair for haemochromatosis patients in rural areas to be billed €80 per venesection or phlebotomy therapy in hospitals when patients in St James's hospital, Dublin 8 are not charged; the reason

it is not a free treatment in all hospitals; if he will address this discrimination and make it a free service to all haemochromatosis patients that do not hold a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9199/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in Ireland are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. Under Section 52 of the Health Act 1970, as amended by Section 12 of the Health (Amendment) Act 2013, a person who has been referred to a hospital for an in-patient service, including that provided on a day case basis, will have to pay the statutory daily charge, currently €80 per day, up to a maximum of €800 per year. On this basis, where venesection is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out-patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies.

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 Waiting Lists**

150. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9205/18]

**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.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme**

151. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9208/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the issues raised concerning medical cards and the Nursing Home Supports Scheme are service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **HSE Governance**

152. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that companies that are awarded HSE contracts do not employ persons on zero hours or if-and-when contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9213/18]

153. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the vetting process the HSE undertakes to ensure that contracted agency staff are not employed on bogus self-employment, zero hours or if-and-when contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9214/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 153 together.

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

### **Medical Card Administration**

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include persons with Crohn's disease as part of the next review of the medical card scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9221/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Medical card provision is solely based on financial assessment. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

Every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. It should be noted, in certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a hospital appointment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9255/18]

**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.

### **Irish Coursing Club**

156. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take in relation to a club (details supplied) and Bord na gCon that allowed the participation of a person in the national hare coursing final. [9034/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the provisions of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, the regulation of coursing is chiefly a matter for the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on an individual case

### **Basic Payment Scheme Payments**

157. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received farm payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9045/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an application under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme on 16 June 2017. As this was after the latest date for submitting BPS applications it was deemed late and therefore no BPS payment issued.

The person named has submitted an appeal which is currently under review. My Department will contact the person named directly if further information is required.

### **Pigmeat Sector**

158. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties that pig farmers are facing with low factory prices for pigs over the past month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9052/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Price volatility is an ongoing challenge for the pig sector and developments over the last few years simply serve to emphasise the cyclical nature of prices in the industry. Current prices at €1.38.30 c/kg are well below prices at the same time in 2017, which was a very good year for pig prices, but remain above the level of price in the same period in both 2015 and 2016.

My Department has made a particular effort to support market diversification for the sector over recent years. The importance of this is well illustrated by the dramatic expansion in Ireland's pig meat exports to the Far East, and to China in particular, against the background of the closure of the Russian market in 2014. And of course the uncertainty around Brexit lends an even greater importance to trade promotion in international markets.

In June 2017 I visited Mexico, now the fourth largest global importer of chilled and frozen pork. With Mexican demand for pork continuing to grow I have made gaining access to that market a priority. I also travelled to Japan and South Korea last autumn where I promoted the development of further opportunities for Irish producers in these jurisdictions as I want to continue to diversify the range of markets to which Ireland has access. Exports to Japan more than doubled to €22m in 2017 putting it in second place in international markets. The new free trade agreement with Japan (JEEPA) should further enhance trade opportunities.

Growth in the Philippines was also strong: up 54 % making it the third largest international market for Irish pigmeat exports.

With Irish production up almost 1% in 2017 and export value increasing some 14% to an estimated €712m, I intend to continue to work with the sector and, by focusing on insight-led growth strategies, continue to take advantage of opportunities for Irish pig meat on international markets.

### **Afforestation Programme**

159. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of afforestation applications which relate to areas of planting of 50 hectares or more and areas of planting less than 50 hectares, respectively; the number of screenings for environmental impact assessments that have been carried out; the number of actual environmental impact assessments that have been carried out; the applications by identification number for which an environmental impact assessment was carried out; the identification number for applications for which appropriate assessment was carried out; the number of hectares planted under the programme for broadleaf species, afforestation of non broadleaf species and reforestation of non broadleaf species, in each year since the introduction of the new forestry programme 2014 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9053/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The EIA Directive (meaning Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014) requires that certain types of development, including afforestation and forest road works, must be assessed to determine the likely environmental effect of the development, before a licence can be granted.

The licensing system operated by my Department, as set out in the Forestry Regulations 2017 (SI 191/2017), ("the Regulations"), provides for an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to be carried out in certain cases. An EIA is mandatory for initial afforestation involving an area of 50 hectares or more, and for forest road works involving a length of 2,000 metres or more. Applications for such projects must be accompanied by an environmental impact statement (EIS), to enable my Department to undertake the EIA. An EIS is an environmental impact assessment report satisfying the requirements of Article 5.1 of the EU Directive and prepared by competent experts. The information to be contained in an EIS is set out in Schedule 4 of the Regulations.

In addition, the Forestry Regulations 2017 provide that all proposed afforestation and forest road works below the mandatory thresholds must be screened for EIA, to consider whether or not significant effects on the environment are likely. This consideration must take into account criteria involving the characteristic of the project, its location, and the type and characteristics of the potential impact, as set out in Schedule 3 of the Regulations. Where it is considered that a proposed sub-threshold development is likely to have significant effects on the environment and should therefore be subject to an EIA, my Department requires the applicant to submit an EIS to enable the EIA to be undertaken.

EIA screening is an assessment undertaken by my Department as part of the normal procedure for evaluating the silvicultural and environmental suitability of a proposed development. The District Forestry Inspector undertakes EIA screening by responding to questions under the various headings: project description; existing land use; cumulative effect and extent of the project; water; soil; protection of Freshwater Pearl Mussel; archaeology; landscape; designated habitats; non-designated habitats; social; accidents; trans-frontier; public participation and NGO participation. This is supported by spatial analysis concerning the area of forest within various hinterlands of the proposed development. In undertaking the EIA screening, the Inspector uses information gained from their scrutiny of aerial photographs and various Geographic Information System (GIS) layers available in the IFORIS mapping system, combined with their knowledge gained through (*inter alia*) field inspection (if required) and a review of referral responses (if any) received from consulted bodies, and submissions from third parties.

My Department has various options to address individual environmental concerns that arise in relation to a proposed forest development. For example, specific conditions, such as increased setbacks or exclusions, can be added to the licence, to avoid any impact. My Department may also seek further information in the form of an expert report in relation to, e.g. archaeology; potential Annex 1 habitats; concerns regarding groundwater; and address any potential impacts identified through licence conditions. Furthermore, my Department has incorporated several protocols into the assessment process, designed to avoid impact concerning particular sensitivities, e.g. surface water acidification; Hen Harrier; Curlew; Freshwater Pearl Mussel; and Small White Orchid.

Therefore, while the EIA screening process may identify potential environmental impacts, these can often be addressed on an individual basis and do not culminate in a significant environmental impact, which would otherwise trigger an EIA.

Since the introduction in 2015 of the Forestry Programme 2014-2020, to the end of December 2017, my Department has received 5,097 applications received under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, none of which was greater than 50 hectares. All of these applications underwent a sub-threshold EIA screening as a matter of course, and while various environmental issues were identified (and later resolved, as above), none of these represented a significant environmental impact. Therefore, no EIAs were triggered during this period. It should be noted that although 5,097 applications were received from 2015 to 2017, only 2,878 approved applications went forward to complete planting.

Regarding applications for which appropriate assessments were carried out the following are the identification numbers requested : CN75337, CN73964, CN73727, CN73105, CN73321 and CN77603.

Planting of broadleaf and coniferous species for 2015 and 2016, the last year in which such data is available, is indicated in the table below.

	Broadleaf	Conifer	Total
2015	1,263.04	5,029.77	6,292.81
2016	1,270.30	5,229.50	6,499.80

With regard to the re-afforestation of coniferous species, my Department prepares the National Forest Inventory (NFI) every five years. The last NFI was completed in 2012 and the table below indicates the total reforested area by species group. Results from the current NFI are expected to be published in 2018.

Species Group	Area (ha)	%
Sitka spruce	87,835	55.9
Norway spruce	5,563	3.5
Scots pine	1,547	1
Other pines	8,540	5.4
Douglas-fir	3,896	2.5
Larch species	9,106	5.8
Other conifers	1,167	0.7
Sessile & Pedunculate oak	3,277	2.1
Beech	4,231	2.7
Ash	3,831	2.4
Sycamore	1,564	1
Birch species	9,880	6.3
Alder	2,274	1.4
Other long living broad-leaves	3,443	2.2
Other short living broad-leaves	11,229	7.1
Total	157,382	100

*Question No. 160 withdrawn.*

### Sheep Welfare Scheme

161. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all sheep inspections will be deferred until after lambing season in view of the fact that carrying out inspections now would cause severe stress on heavily pregnant ewes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9064/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Inspections under the various EU funded schemes, including the Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS), are necessary in order to comply with EU regulatory requirements.

The Sheep Welfare Scheme was introduced to contribute to the continued development of animal health and welfare practices in the sheep sector. My Department ensures compliance on the part of SWS applicants by way of on-farm inspections and administrative control checks. The rate of on-farm inspection under the Sheep Welfare Scheme is 5%. These checks are undertaken to confirm that the requisite number of breeding ewes have been retained and to verify that the two scheme actions have been completed.

Every effort is made by Department officials to minimise disruption as much as possible

to both the farmer and livestock on the holding in both the timing and undertaking of inspections. Insofar as possible inspections are integrated, to this effect over two-thirds of the SWS on-farm inspections are carried out in conjunction with Ovine Identification & Registration (IDR) inspections under Cross Compliance requirements, which normally take place between the months of April and December. In these circumstances a second farm visit is required towards the end of the scheme year in order to verify that the scheme actions have been satisfactorily completed. The inspecting officer checks that the Scheme Action Record Book has been completed and checks any supporting documentation provided by the applicant. As the ewe count has been previously completed it is not necessary for the inspecting officer to pen and count the ewes again.

The remaining one-third of SWS inspections take place towards the end of the SWS scheme year. The breeding ewe count and the verification of the two scheme actions are completed in one farm visit. Department officials, who are very conscious of all of the animal welfare considerations, endeavour to minimise and avoid stress to livestock on the holding when conducting sheep inspections. When carrying out inspections during the lambing season Department officials adhere to previously agreed protocols, between the Department and the Farming Organisations, aimed at minimising animal stress and preventing the mis-mothering/smothering or injuring of lambs.

I would like to assure the Deputy that I and officials in my Department are very aware of the concerns being expressed. The Deputy will appreciate, however, that I must ensure that the EU regulatory requirements on inspections are complied with in order to protect payments under the various schemes and to avoid substantial EU disallowances.

### **GLAS Administration**

162. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to launch a fourth tranche of the GLAS scheme; and if so, the changes from GLAS 1, 2 and 3. [9074/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The target set out in the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 to approve 50,000 GLAS participants before the end of 2018 has already been achieved. The fact that the RDP target has been achieved almost two years ahead of schedule is a significant achievement on the part of both farmers and my Department and is evidence of the commitment of Irish farmers to the sustainable growth of the Irish agri-food sector into the future.

The GLAS scheme is one of a suite of measures under the RDP schemes and the re-opening of any scheme can only be considered within the overall RDP budget which is currently fully committed. There are no plans to re-open the scheme. My focus now is on managing the ongoing participation of those approved into the GLAS Scheme.

### **Question Heading for question(s) 163**

163. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to help farmers, especially beef farmers after Brexit. [9076/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Brexit has the potential to have a significant impact across all areas of the Irish agri food sector, including the beef sector.

The agri-food sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy. Its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural Ireland in particular. Farming is an essential part of the social, cultural and economic fabric of the country and it is also part of a wider EU dispensation that values a Common Agriculture Policy built on family farming, food security, high standards of food safety and environmental sustainability. These are values that we hold dear, and so it is critically important when we consider the impact of Brexit that the positive contribution of agriculture to the rural and national economy, and to society in Ireland, and indeed elsewhere in the European Union, is to the forefront in our deliberations.

I and my Department have been very focused over the last 18 months on mitigating the short-term impacts arising from Brexit through practical actions aimed in particular at reducing costs for beef and other farmers.

In addition to the €150 million low-cost loan scheme I introduced under Budget 2017, I announced a further series of dedicated measures, amounting to over €50 million in total, in Budget 2018. I am also working with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, on the introduction of the new €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme, in respect of which food businesses will have access to 40 per cent of the funding.

Market diversification is another key component of the Government response to the challenges posed by Brexit, as we seek to reduce our exposure to the UK market and develop alternative markets for our exports. So, for example, market prioritisation research commissioned by my Department and carried out by Bord Bia is informing the selection of Trade Mission destinations as well as my Department's input to the Government's Global Footprint Initiative.

Indeed, I will be leaving this weekend on a trade mission to the US and Canada, and will undertake further missions over the remainder of 2018, with a focus in particular on emerging markets that provide opportunities for further growth in agri-food exports.

Referring specifically to the beef sector, I fully acknowledge the contribution that Irish beef farmers are making to the agri economy, with beef accounting for €2.4bn, or almost 18%, of our agri food exports in 2017. The fact that it is founded on a predominantly pasture-based production system gives us a unique marketing advantage throughout the world in opening up new markets for Irish beef.

In addition to increasing markets for processed beef, I have, since I took office, made it a priority to increase the levels of live exports. The results of these efforts are being seen in an increase of 45,000 head, or 30%, in the number of live animals exported in 2017 compared to 2016. Two key elements of this increase were further additional exports of suckler bred animals to Turkey, and an increase in the export of dairy male calves which will have a positive consequence for the market for slaughtered cattle in 2018 and 2019. I see a vibrant live export trade as an important source of income for suckler farmers especially, and will continue my efforts in this area in 2018.

My Department and our agencies will continue to work with the sector to help mitigate the impacts of Brexit, particularly those affecting beef and other farmers, and we will continue to seek a negotiated outcome that will ensure that the trading relationship between the EU and the UK in its entirety post-Brexit will remain as close as possible to the current arrangements.

### **Sheep Welfare Scheme Funding**

164. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the source from which funds for the sheep welfare scheme in 2017 and 2018 were reallocated;

and the value for money criteria used when assessing the allocation of such funds. [9106/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Sheep Welfare Scheme was introduced in December 2016 to contribute to the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. The Scheme is programmed under Measure 14 of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 - 2020 and it complements the range of other RDP supports available to sheep farmers under schemes such as GLAS, TAMS, Knowledge Transfer and the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

The 2nd amendment to the RDP introduced the Sheep Welfare Scheme. The financial allocation for the scheme was provided for in the RDP by way of additional national financing.

In order to underpin the delivery of value for money from the investment in the RDP, extensive preparatory analyses form the basis of all the schemes and measures in the RDP. In relation to the sheep scheme, these analyses highlighted particular viability issues within the sheep sector as well as pointing to a strong economic rationale for investing in animal health and welfare. The sheep sector supports 35,000 farm families directly, as well as several thousand other jobs directly and indirectly in the rural economy. In 2017 exports from the sector were worth €274 million, an increase of 12% compared to 2016.

The actions chosen for targeted support under the scheme were those identified as making a meaningful positive contribution to sheep welfare having regard to the systems of production in Ireland and the environment in which Irish sheep production is carried out. This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall sheep sector.

The scheme will also allow for the collection and generation of valuable data on welfare statistics and practices in sheep farming in Ireland. The data generated by this scheme has the potential to make a significant contribution to the Irish sheep industry beyond the lifetime of the scheme in terms of its ability to provide large scale data on welfare in Irish flocks.

### **Forestry Sector**

165. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an environmental impact assessment or appropriate assessment, for example, a natura impact assessment, was conducted at a site (details supplied); and if the forestry service granted a tree felling licence or a tree felling licence exemption for the removal of trees. [9107/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An authorised officer of my Department met with the land owner on site on the 2nd February 2018. The uprooting and clearance of trees is currently being investigated. My Department is also investigating compliance with the EIA (Agriculture) Regulations which came into force on 8th September 2011.

While these investigations are ongoing, it is not appropriate to comment further.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Administration**

166. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an exemption will be given from making applications for the basic payment scheme and the ANC scheme online to those that do not have a computer or broadband available to them and that receive agricultural grants of less than €3,000 per annum in view of the disproportionate cost of paying an adviser or other professional to complete the form online; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [9115/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the EU regulations, applications for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) are to be submitted online. I am aware that for some people, this will be the first year that they will have engaged with the online applications process.

To help farmers to submit their application online in 2018, I have ensured the early opening for the BPS application facility in 2018. The application process in 2018 is opening over a month earlier than in 2017. This will provide more time for farmers to familiarise themselves with the online application facility and to submit their applications. My Department has already contacted those farmers who applied in paper form in 2017 advising them of the new requirement to submit online in 2018, to provide them with guidance material in relation to starting their online application, and to advise them that further supports will be rolled out by my Department in the coming weeks.

Officials from my Department will implement a range of supports to farmers over the coming weeks, including a series of BPS clinics in locations throughout the country. These clinics have proved very successful in recent years, and will be available on a much wider scale this year. The format will enable farmers to sit with an official from my Department who will guide them through the process of submitting their application online there and then. The location details in relation to these clinics are currently being finalised. In the meantime, officials from my Department have been present at the ongoing series of CAP consultation meetings around the country to assist any farmers with queries in relation to online applications.

Other supports such as telephone help lines and 'How to' guides will also be in place. As we move towards the application deadline, my Department will be in contact with farmers again to provide further details on available supports. I am committed to ensuring that the supports being put in place will ensure that all farmers are able to access these important payments.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

167. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of officials and advisers that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9147/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** One senior official from my Department and one Ministerial Adviser travelled to the launch of Project Ireland 2040 in County Sligo last week.

Travel, subsistence and accommodation costs will be paid at the normal civil service rates, as appropriate, in due course.

### **Aquaculture Licence Eligibility**

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of oyster farming at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9165/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The

licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In accordance with statutory procedures, a Public Notice was placed in 'The Kerryman' by an applicant for an Aquaculture Licence on 31st January, 2018.

The details of this application and relevant accompanying documentation (including Environmental Impact Assessment Screening) are currently available for scrutiny at Killorglin Garda Station which has restricted hours and Killarney Garda Station which is open 24 hours and may also be viewed on the Aquaculture/Foreshore Licence Applications Section of my Department's website.

Any person may, during the period of 4 weeks from the date of publication of the Public Notice, make written submissions or observations to my Department per the details set out in the notification. The licence application referred to is under active consideration by my Department as part of a statutory process. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the application pending the completion of this process.

In addition, my Department is currently processing 10 further applications in the Rossbeigh/Glenbeigh/Dooks area which have not yet reached the public consultation stage of the licensing process.

All applications are examined in accordance with the applicable legislation and full account is taken of the engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects relevant to each application.

The legislation governing aquaculture licensing also provides for an appeals mechanism. Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body.

### **GLAS Payments**

169. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 441 of 23 January 2018, when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9202/18]

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

Administrative checks take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear these checks before payment can issue.

In the processing of the 2017 advance payment an issue presented in relation to this claim. This issue is being investigated by my Department in order to process payment. Once resolved the payment will issue. GLAS payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

### **Beef Data and Genomics Programme**

170. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria for a person to opt out of a scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9209/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) was approved as an agri environment scheme by the EU Commission as part of Ireland's RDP with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the suckler herd. As with all agri environment schemes applicants commit to participating in the scheme for a number of years. In the case of the BDGP a six year commitment is required. Therefore when a participant withdraws from the BDGP all payments previously made are subject to recovery. In certain limited circumstances however it may be possible to withdraw from the scheme without recovery of previous payments on force majeure grounds, as set out below.

- death of the beneficiary,
- long term professional incapacity of the beneficiary,
- expropriation of all or a large part of the holding if that expropriation could not have been anticipated on the day of lodging the application,
- a severe natural disaster gravely affecting the holding,
- the accidental destruction of livestock buildings on the holding,
- an epizootic or a plant disease affecting part or all of the beneficiary's livestock or crops respectively.

Any request to withdraw from the BDGP must be made in writing as soon as possible, and should be accompanied by any relevant supporting documentation. Such requests are considered on a case by case basis.

### **Horse Racing Ireland**

171. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to changes to the broadcasting rights to Irish racing from a television channel (details supplied); the role his Department has in this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9233/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Horse Racing Ireland is a commercial state body responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The matter referred to by the Deputy is an operational matter for Horse Racing Ireland. My Department had no role in the decision referred to.

### **Energy Schemes**

172. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if council tenants can avail of a rooftop solar grant in summer 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9027/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** On foot of the October 2017 stakeholder workshop hosted by my Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) along with further engagement with the micro generation industry, I have asked the SEAI to conduct a short study to assess the likely demand for and impact of micro generation, among the public. It is important that before we

deploy further public money we validate the demand and projected cost in an Irish context.

The proposed pilot scheme which I announced at the recent Renewable Energy Summit will commence this summer and will target solar PV and self-consumption amongst domestic customers. The data gathered during this scheme and throughout the behavioural and attitudes study will inform future phases of support for micro generation in Ireland, as we align with the ambition of the recast Renewable Energy Directive which recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers and deliver on ambitions and commitments made in the Energy White Paper and the Programme for Government.

Further details of the pilot scheme for domestic rooftop solar PV self-consumption will be made available when I have received the study being undertaken by the SEAI and have had an opportunity to consider its analysis. I intend that the final decision will be made in sufficient time to allow the scheme to commence this summer.

As set out in the National Mitigation Plan, a very significant increase in effort is required to realise the potential of the residential sector to contribute to the low carbon transition. Already, solar PV is supported under the Better Energy Communities Scheme and the Deep Retrofit Pilot.

Additionally, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government currently supports local authorities in an ambitious plan to improve the energy efficiency and comfort levels in local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and contributing to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction and energy efficiency targets for 2020. Funding of some €115.7 million has been provided from 2013 to the end 2017 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in almost 64,000 local authority homes. Under this Programme, tenants do not apply for a grant to undertake works, rather the Council identifies the units to be retrofitted and undertakes the works with funding provided by the Department.

### **Commission for Regulation of Utilities**

173. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9043/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy has been in place since 2001 and supports certain security of supply and renewable energy objectives. The levy is a charge on all electricity customers without exception and its amount is determined by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU).

The resolution of customer complaints are a matter taken very seriously by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) which offers a free and independent complaint resolution service. At [www.cru.ie/home/complaint-form/energy/](http://www.cru.ie/home/complaint-form/energy/), the CRU explains its process for the handling of energy complaints, which involves logging the complaint and completing the complaint handling process, with, as relevant in the particular circumstances, the supplier or the network operator. As Minister I have no role in the day to day operations, or the regulation, of electricity or gas companies

The best resolution of any complaint is directly with the energy supplier, but the CRU states that if a customer has completed the complaints handling process of a supplier or network operator, and is still not happy, that the customer should log a formal complaint with the CRU. This can be done on the CRU's website from the link above or by contacting the CRU in other

ways as follows: by email to *customercare@cru.ie* or by telephone at 1890 404 404.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

174. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the roll-out of broadband; and if the roll-out of high speed broadband is included in the national development plan. [9075/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Development Plan sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF). The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is included in the National Development Plan as one of those priorities. The 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.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to engage a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion and a subsidy level has been approved by Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence. Current estimates for rollout indicate the majority of premises in the State intervention area will have access to a high speed broadband connection within 3 years of the beginning of rollout.

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.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

175. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to research in Irish universities, institutes and industry on the extraction of carbon from natural gas and the production of clean hydrogen based energy; and the steps he has taken to encourage this research. [9143/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I am aware that considerable scientific research is being undertaken at Irish universities

and institutes and by industry into new renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, much of which is exchequer funded. Specifically in the areas the deputy is enquiring about, I recently opened a Biomethane Stakeholders Group at which the research team from University College Cork presented. The stakeholder group is part of on-going stakeholder consultation on the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat which aims to meet our European Targets for renewable heat. It is intended that biomethane injection into the gas grid will form part of the next phase of the support scheme.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) SEAI 2018 Research, Development & Demonstration Funding Programme, which is fully funded by my department, includes research in the area of bioenergy and biomethane. During 2017, this SEAI Programme funded projects in the broad bioenergy/bioemethane/biofuel areas, including research with the following organisations: the University of Limerick; the Technology Centre for Biobased Resources; the Irish Bioenergy Association; Premier Green Energy; Dundalk Institute of Technology; Dowmann Ltd.; BMS Technologies; and the Cré Composting and Anaerobic Digestion Association of Ireland.

Last year SEAI published the *Assessment of Cost and Benefits of Biogas and Biomethane in Ireland*. This study looked at the contribution that biogas and biomethane could make to renewable energy production, through electricity and heat generation and the replacement of natural gas.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the SEAI, both of whom are funded by my department, provide funding to academic researchers and industry in the areas of environmental protection (EPA) and sustainable energy (SEAI).

SEAI funds Ireland's participation in the International Energy Agency Bioenergy Task 37 - Energy from Biogas. Task 37 is an international working group which covers the anaerobic digestion (AD) of biomass feedstocks including agricultural residues, energy crops, organic-rich waste waters, and domestic and industrial organic wastes. Anaerobic digestion is a process to treat biodegradable waste to reduce landfill emissions and is also a source of renewable energy.

I am aware of recent developments in the possibilities for hydrogen to play a role in our energy systems and will be launching a position paper on this subject at NUI Galway on 20th March.

Gas Networks Ireland are managing the 'Causeway project', co-funded by the European Union, which represents a significant step in delivering a sustainable alternative fuel for Irish transport. The project will see the formation of a national Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) refuelling network, the first renewable gas injection facility in Ireland from a biogas plant in Kildare, and the deployment of a fleet of CNG vehicles. Projects such as these will increase the penetration of alternative lower carbon fuels in Ireland and help to reduce greenhouse gas and air pollutants from traditional transport fuels such as diesel.

Green CO<sub>2</sub> recovery is an option for Biogas plants where the biogas needs to be cleaned prior to injection into the natural gas grid. Officials from my department attended the recent Green Gas Certification project which aims to provide a verifiable and sustainable certification process for green gas projects to help meet our climate and energy targets. The potential for Green CO<sub>2</sub> from biogas plants was also raised at this forum.

It is hoped that the research being funded by the Government, aligned with the new support schemes being developed by my Department, will encourage and increase the amount of low carbon sources used in our energy mix.

## Departmental Staff Data

176. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of officials and advisers that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9158/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** One official from the Department and my Press Advisor travelled to the launch of the NDP and NPF by the Government in Sligo on 16 February 2018. Travel and subsistence costs, which are payable at the normal civil service rates, are not available at this time as no claims have yet been submitted to the Department for payment.

## Internet Safety

177. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 263 of 18 January 2018, if there have been further developments in relation to the appointment of a digital safety commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9164/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The subject of online safety for all individuals but especially for children is of vital concern and importance to me. This issue is a complex and multifaceted one and effective actions in this area rely on the active engagement of all stakeholders including Government, technology companies and parents.

On Tuesday 21 November 2017 I convened a meeting with my colleagues, the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and their officials to discuss online safety issues, including the various initiatives which are taking place at a national and European level to tackle illegal or harmful content online.

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

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

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

## Motor Tax

178. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review the motor tax payment system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9102/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Motor tax is payable on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates applicable for the half-yearly and quarterly options are 55.5% and 28.25% of the annual charge, respectively. These relativities have remained generally consistent since the 1960s.

The differential takes account of the extra workload for staff in motor tax offices and the Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division (which operates the motor tax online facility) in processing non-annual renewals, as well as the resultant administrative and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. Each quarterly renewal of motor tax follows the same administrative procedures as the annual renewal process. Consequently, renewing on a quarterly basis generates four times the workload of an annual renewal for the equivalent period.

Based on the number of motor tax transactions in 2017, the annual cost of abolishing the additional charge associated with the half-yearly and quarterly options would be in the order of €52.7m. The loss of income that would arise from changing these arrangements would have a negative impact on the total collected via motor tax and would have to be borne elsewhere in the motor tax system or through the taxation system generally.

I have no plans currently to review the basis for paying motor tax on a half-yearly or quarterly basis.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding provided or committed to by his Department to local authorities for the construction of new local and regional roads in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, by project. [9061/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Details of the grant allocations and payments for road improvement projects under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes for the years mentioned in the Deputy's Question are included in the Regional and Local Road Grant Payment and Allocation booklets which are available in the Oireachtas library.

### **Bus Services**

180. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of bus service route 52 travelling through Swinford and Kiltimagh in County Mayo; if there are proposed changes to the route; and if so, the changes and justification for same. [9101/18]

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

### **Rail Services Data**

181. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of Luas trams in operation in each of the years 2015 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9105/18]

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

### **Rail Services Provision**

182. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to commence the independent review of the western rail corridor as promised in the programme for Government and in the national development plan 2018 to 2027 as part of the Atlantic economic corridor; if the development of commuter rail from County Mayo and Tuam to Galway city will form part of the review in addition to intercity services and freight connections; if the terms of reference of the review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9114/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to provide for an independent costing and review of the Western Rail Corridor Phase II between Athenry and Claremorris for passenger and freight use. The National Development Plan, which was published last week with the National Planning Framework, restates this commitment.

As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government also commits that no measures will be taken to prevent the future reactivation of the corridor for rail use. Arrangements for the proposed independent review of WRC are currently being considered by my Department.

### **Roads Maintenance Funding**

183. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when Galway and Mayo County Councils will be issued with details of the 2018 county roads programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9117/18]

184. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when details of the specific county roads grants will be notified to Galway and Mayo County Councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9118/18]

185. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a response will issue to Galway county council in relation to its request for funding to complete the route selection process on the new R336 from Bearna to Baile na hAbhann; if a response has issued; if so, the details of the response; the amount sought by the council; the amount provided by his department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9119/18]

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

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant County or City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supple-

mented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

Local authorities were notified of their grant allocations in January. Details of the grant allocations, including an allocation in relation to the R336 Connemara Access Road, are in the Regional and Local Road Grant Allocation booklet which is available in the Oireachtas library. It is a matter for each local authority to assess its priorities and draw up a roadworks programme for the year based on the State grant funding and own resources available to it.

### **Driver Test Waiting Lists**

186. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to address the delays affecting persons in County Wexford awaiting a driving test appointment at the RSA driving test centre, Gorey; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9129/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

### **Driver Test Centres**

187. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of full time driving testers posted to the RSA driving test centre Gorey, County Wexford, in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9130/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

### **Airport Development Projects**

188. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason homes in an area (details supplied) directly under the flight path of runway 16/34 at Dublin Airport were not considered for noise insulation in view of the sustained use of this runway at night and as an alternative to the main runway in adverse weather conditions. [9132/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the deputy is aware, daa holds statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Dublin Airport, including responsibility for the mitigation of aircraft noise which may effect neighbouring communities.

I have been informed that this issue relates to the ongoing resurfacing of the main southern runway which started in November 2016 and is scheduled for completion in April 2018. The project requires the use of the crosswind runway, R16/34 at night for that 18-month period.

These works can only be carried out at night between the hours of 9pm and 5am when the airport is least busy as it requires the full closure of the main runway. While the night time works are ongoing, the airport has no alternative but to use its secondary runway, R16/34 to facilitate landings and take-offs during this time.

The daa began highlighting the necessity for this project in 2015 and took steps to communicate with local communities in respect of the time and scope of the works. Due to the concerns of residents living under the southerly flight path to runway 16/34, which is the most populated flight path to this runway daa have committed to using the northerly flight path for the duration of this project where at all possible other than when weather conditions dictate.

Following the completion of the works on the main runway, daa advise that R16/34 will only be used in exceptional circumstances i.e. where wind/safety reasons dictate. Therefore, no increased noise disruption beyond the duration of the overlay works is anticipated.

The Deputy may also be aware that in compliance with an EU Regulation (598/2014) concerning Noise Related Operating Restrictions at EU Airports, I recently announced plans for the establishment of an independent body to regulate airport noise at Dublin Airport in accordance with prescribed procedures for assessing and, where appropriate, ensuring the adoption of measures to mitigate noise impacts. With the support of Government, I intend to appoint Fingal County Council as the Competent Authority. The necessary statutory arrangements are a priority objective for my Department in 2018.

It is my view that provisions of the Regulation, including the appointment of an independent regulator, represent a huge improvement on current arrangements for noise management at the Airport and that full implementation is in the broad national interest and in the best interests of local residents.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

189. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of officials and advisers that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9148/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Project Ireland 2040, comprised of the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework, represents a key strategy to build the infrastructure that our Transport, Tourism and Sport sectors need to meet both current and future demands.

The entire Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport contributed in some way to the development of the National Development Plan over recent months. The agencies and state bodies under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport were also key contributors and their support was invaluable. In fact some key officials have been working on the National Planning Framework in consultation with colleagues in other Government Departments for a number of years.

On the day of the launch itself, three Departmental officials were also present at the launch of Project Ireland 2040 in County Sligo. A number of briefing sessions were planned for the day and as some of those happened concurrent with the Government meeting it was appropriate to have representatives of the Department on hand to help with queries. As is normal in such circumstances, costs associated with official travel are eligible to be paid in line with standard Civil Service rates; however, no costs have yet been paid. It is the practice in my Department that travel costs are claimed soon after they are incurred and I am sure that this will be the case in this instance too.

Much of the promotional material used was produced centrally with our input but at no direct cost to my Department. Therefore direct expenses incurred by this Department relating to the launch are likely to fall with a range of between €1,000 and €2,000.

## Tourism Policy

190. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding available for the development and promotion of Tullaghan, County Leitrim (details supplied); if Tullaghan is considered a discovery point in national tourism policy; his plans to develop Tullaghan in national tourism policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9220/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy development. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, such as the Wild Atlantic Way and other Experience Brands. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland to invest in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital programmes. Similarly, the Department does not have discretionary funds at its disposal to assist with individual tourism proposals.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

## Sports Funding

191. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the private members sports clubs that have received funding in the past 20 years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9232/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The primary aim of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is to provide capital funding for projects that will maximise participation in sport and physical activity. In determining whether or not an organisation is private the following information is provided in the guide to making an application: *"SCP funding is focused on community sports where the maximum number of people can participate. The Department may deem any organisation that places excessive restrictions on membership or usage as a private organisation and therefore not eligible for SCP funding."*

The most recent allocations under the SCP were made in November and December 2017 and full details of these and previous SCP allocations are available on my Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-awards-new>

In relation to future rounds of the SCP, my Department is currently undertaking a review of the 2017 round with a view to making recommendations on how to improve the process for future calls.

## Domestic Violence Refuges Provision

192. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to address the lack of refuge accommodation for women in counties Cavan and Monaghan; her further plans to address the failure to provide the number of refuge places here as per the recommendation of the Council of Europe; her plans to address the failure to meet the requirement of the Istanbul Convention to provide shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommoda-

tion for and to reach out proactively to victims; her further plans to address the delays in ratifying the Convention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9162/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Programme for Government commits to full implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). Responsibility for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The Istanbul Convention is a significant legal instrument in tackling violence against women and domestic violence. Many of the actions required by provisions in the Istanbul Convention are being implemented on a daily basis under current legislation and administrative practice. The actions necessary to ratify the Istanbul Convention are contained in the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021, published in January, 2016.

The implementation of most of these actions is underway including public sector training/education by a range of State agencies, the development of a Risk Assessment Matrix by An Garda Síochána, commissioning of national helpline services to respond to issues of domestic and sexual violence and support for child witnesses.

The remaining outstanding actions are legislative and require delivery of two pieces of legislation:

- The Domestic Violence Bill, which was published on 3rd February, 2017. The Bill has passed all stages in the Seanad and Second Stage in the Dáil. Committee stage is expected to commence shortly in the Dáil. It is hoped that this Bill will be enacted early this year. The enactment of this legislation is key to advancing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention as its enactment will deliver four of the actions required under the Istanbul Convention.

- The one remaining legislative action is the enactment of legislation for extraterritorial jurisdiction. Work on this action is underway and it is anticipated that this legislation will be published in the first half of 2018.

- When the required legislative actions are implemented, Ireland will be in a position to ratify the Istanbul Convention.

- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has statutory responsibility for the provision of care and protection to victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV).

- In 2017, additional funding of €1.5m was allocated to Tusla to support the development of services. I was pleased to secure a further increase of €1.7m for 2018, bringing the total level of funding for DSGBV services to €23.8m. This includes funding for some 60 services throughout the country, including emergency refuge and support services.

The provision of domestic violence refuge spaces nationally in 2017 was 155 family units, comprising 147 emergency refuge family units and 8 emergency non-refuge family units. Guidance from the Council of Europe in relation to the provision of family places in a refuge indicates that “In member states where shelters form part of a community strategy with intervention projects, there should be one family place per 10,000 women”. Using the methodology set out by the Council of Europe, based on average family size and overall bed capacity, where a “family place should cater for a woman and the number of children based on the average family size for the country”, current provision in Ireland is one family place per 7,765 adult women thus exceeding the recommendation for minimum refuge provision.

However, given the variations in configurations of unit size and type, the emergency basis of provision and geographical distribution of demand, it is impossible to ensure a direct match between available units and family size and there have been geographical disparities in provision across the country. Tusla recognises the need to assure that the complement of emergency refuge services nationally matches as best as possible within available resources, demands for services and the needs of service users.

Services for victims of domestic abuse in the North East region, namely counties Louth, Meath, Cavan, and Monaghan, received approximately €1.4m in funding from Tusla in 2017. Services to victims of domestic violence in counties Cavan and Monaghan are provided by Tearmann Domestic Violence Services, which received funding of approximately €192,000 from Tusla in 2017 for the provision of support and advocacy services to victims. Individuals based in West Cavan can avail of the services of the Domestic Violence Advocacy Service for Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan, which also provides support and advocacy services. This service received approximately €317,000 in funding in 2017. Subject to the availability of spaces, women from counties Cavan and Monaghan may also avail of refuge services in Dublin or other parts of the country in line with availability of spaces and safety needs.

Tusla has no immediate plans to provide a refuge in the Cavan/Monaghan area. There are three refuges situated in Drogheda, Co. Louth; Dundalk, Co. Louth; and Navan, Co. Meath, which provide emergency domestic violence accommodation to women based in the North East region. This includes 21 family units of emergency refuge accommodation.

As part of its commissioning approach to developing services, Tusla carried out a number of needs analyses projects in 2017 to identify gaps in service provision and to prioritise service developments. All future service developments, whether based in the North East region or elsewhere, will be informed by Tusla's commissioning approach. In 2017, Tearmann Domestic Violence Services completed a Strategic Plan as a means of improving and developing services in counties Cavan and Monaghan. Tusla will meet Tearmann Domestic Violence Services and other partners shortly with a view to supporting these developments.

### **Youth Homelessness Strategy**

193. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 525 of 27 June 2017, the steps she has taken to ascertain the levels of youth homelessness amongst the LGBTI+ community; the further steps she is taking to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9201/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla has a duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care or protection, including children who present as homeless, and are not in the care of their parents.

Tusla provides assessment and care to children in this situation, understanding that there is always an underlying reason for a child to present as homeless. In the case of a young LGBTI+ person this may be occurring at a time when the family is coming to an understanding of their changed identity, and the challenges that may create for members of the family.

In the first instance, and in consultation with the child, Tusla social workers will see if it is possible for the child to be re-integrated into the care of their family or extended family. This will only occur where it is in the child's best interest and where there is a plan to address the issues that led to the child leaving, or being told to leave, the family home. If this is not a

suitable or safe option the child will be received into care and placed with a foster family or residential centre. In a small number of cases they may provide accommodation and support to a 17 year old.

An assessment is carried out as to the reasons for a child coming into care, their current and future needs and how these are to be met are set out in their Care Plan. While there is no specific plan for LGBTI+ children received into care, the reasons for their presentation as homeless forms an integral part of their assessment and care plan, through which appropriate services and supports will be identified.

Their social worker, foster carer or residential staff will need to ensure they have the information and understanding necessary to help the young person. When they leave care at 18 years of age, their after care plan should address ongoing supports for them as an LGBTI+ young person as well as income and health supports, accommodation and help with their educational ambitions. While the provision of housing is a function of the housing or local authorities, Tusla co-operates with the housing authorities as part of aftercare planning.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to develop a National LGBT Youth Strategy. This is a key commitment for my Department. It also contributes to the Government's broader commitment to continuing to strive for full inclusion of LGBTI+ people in Ireland.

The Strategy will be the first of its kind in the world and will identify the additional measures that are required to ensure that young people identifying as LGBTI+ can achieve the same outcomes as all children and young people. The actions which the Strategy will recommend are still under consideration, with expected publication in Summer 2018.

Research into the scale of the problem of homeless LGBTI young people, has been raised during the development of the strategy process. I am aware that Focus Ireland are now undertaking research in this area and I will ask that my officials to meet with Focus Ireland and Tusla to discuss the project.

### **Youth Services Funding**

194. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding provided to youth services in Dublin city in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [9058/18]

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

The funding provided to youth services in the Dublin city area for the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018 is provided in the following table.

Year	Youth funding provided for youth services in Dublin City
2015	€13,032,525
2016	€12,983,190
2017	€13,593,120
2018	€2,892,108

### **Public Sector Pay**

195. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the issue of public sector pay restoration for those staff in the City of Dublin Youth Service Board funded youth projects will be addressed; and if funding has been put in place to enable this restoration. [9059/18]

196. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the concerns of board members of City of Dublin Youth Service funded projects that pay restoration without increased funding will lead to staff layoffs and reductions in programme budgets, will be addressed. [9060/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

City of Dublin Youth Service Board is a statutory body which administers grants to approximately ninety youth projects throughout Dublin city. I am aware that a number of youth workers based in Dublin City and employed in projects administered by the City of Dublin Youth Service Board, are on scales linked to public pay scales and may be eligible for increases under the Haddington Road agreement. In this regard, I was advised by City of Dublin Youth Service Board of a circular issued by the Department of Education and Skills issued in 2017 and that this circular applies to these youth workers.

It is important to note that the youth workers employed by these services are not public servants and that this local arrangement is unique to services operating in Dublin City. I am also advised that all other youth services operating in Dublin and in the rest of the country are not impacted by the Haddington Road agreement.

Based on the information provided to my Department, the cost of implementing the Haddington Road agreement in these Dublin City services is more than offset by the increases provided to all youth services over the past two years. In 2016, all staff-led youth services were provided with a 2.5% increase in allocation. In 2017, services were provided with a 5% increase in their allocation.

My Department has commenced a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2018 and to finalise the 2018 allocations. The primary purpose of this process to ensure that youth services are sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people and particularly those who are at risk of drugs or, alcohol misuse, early school leaving, homelessness or who are living in disadvantaged communities. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible and notify all youth services of their allocation for the year.

In this regard, officials within my Department have recently met with and are continuing to work with officials from the City of Dublin Youth Service Board to identify service needs and emerging trends in Dublin City.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

197. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of officials and advisers that travelled from her Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9155/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can inform the Deputy that none of my advisors or officials travelled to the launch to which he refers.

## Youth Services Funding

198. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if additional funding will be provided to a service (details supplied) to cover the cost of 1% pay increases under the unwinding of FEMPI in order to ensure that the additional staffing costs do not impact service provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9229/18]

199. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of providing additional youth service funding to cover the cost of the pay increases resulting from the unwinding of FEMPI; the steps she is taking to ensure this does not impact service provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9230/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

City of Dublin Youth Service Board is a statutory body which administers grants to approximately ninety youth projects throughout Dublin city. I am aware that a number of youth workers based in Dublin City and employed in projects administered by the City of Dublin Youth Service Board, are on scales linked to public pay scales and may be eligible for increases under the Haddington Road agreement. In this regard, I was advised by City of Dublin Youth Service Board of a circular issued by the Department of Education and Skills in 2017 and that this circular applies to these youth workers.

It is important to note that the youth workers employed by these services are not public servants and that this local arrangement is unique to services operating in Dublin City. I am also advised that all other youth services operating in Dublin and in the rest of the country are not impacted by the Haddington Road agreement.

Based on the information provided to my Department, the cost of implementing the Haddington Road agreement in these Dublin City services is more than offset by the increases provided to all youth services over the past two years. In 2016, all staff-led youth services were provided with a 2.5% increase in allocation. In 2017, services were provided with a 5% increase in their allocation.

My Department has commenced a process with national organisations and local services, including Ballymun Regional Youth Service, to identify service development needs for 2018 and to finalise the 2018 allocations. The primary purpose of this process to ensure that youth services are sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people and particularly those who are at risk of drugs or alcohol misuse, early school leaving, homelessness or who are living in disadvantaged communities. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible and notify all youth services of their allocation for the year.

In this regard, officials within my Department have recently met with and are continuing to work with officials from the City of Dublin Youth Service Board to identify service needs and emerging trends in Dublin City.

## Youth Services Funding

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she has adequate funds available to her Department to provide the necessary financial support for youth organisations throughout the country; the degree to which she expects to extend such services in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9235/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In 2018, €58.9 m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services, an increase of €1.5m on 2017. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. Funding to staff led youth services has generally been targeted at areas of disadvantage and not in proportion to the youth population of a given area.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department is managing the most significant reform of youth services ever undertaken. This reform will provide an opportunity to identify need and to focus funding on young people most in need of intervention. Last year, I approved funding for the establishment of new youth projects and for the augmentation of a small number of existing youth services to meet new challenges arising from population increases and related identified needs.

Future development and investment in youth services will be informed by the mapping exercise completed last year, which mapped youth service provision across the State. This mapping will assist the Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. My Department is committed to working with ETBs to identify need and explore ways to address this need where it emerges.

### **Youth Services**

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department and bodies under her aegis maintain regular and adequate contact with the various youth groups throughout the country with particular reference to identifying their needs and taking onboard their anticipated requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9236/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department maintains close contact with the national youth organisations and I and officials from my Department meet formally with these organisations twice a year to share knowledge and information on developments in the youth sector. A separate meeting is held on that day with national organisations in receipt of targeted youth funding to keep them updated on the ongoing work on the Value for Money and Policy Review reforms.

Youth Officers of the Education and Training Boards provide an important support role to my Department in the co-ordination and administration of youth services at local level across the country. In order to keep my Department informed of their ongoing work, officials hold quarterly meetings attended by all Youth Officers from across the country. These meetings assist my Department in identifying service needs, particularly for vulnerable young people. The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department has set up a working group with five Youth Officers focussed on strategic planning for future capital funding for the youth sector.

My Department holds scheduled meetings with Youth Work Ireland twice a year in relation to the important work of this organisation. My officials have also attended a meeting of Youth Work Ireland Regional Directors and were pleased to accept an invitation to attend this meeting twice a year from now on. There is also ongoing active engagement between my Department and the youth constituency of the of the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures Advisory Council. A small number of national youth organisation representatives are members of this Council.

Officials from the Youth Affairs Unit are engaged with programmes run by the National

Youth Council of Ireland such as the Youth Arts Strategic Review and Plan Advisory Steering Group and the National Health Programme Strategic Planning Working Group, both of which receive funding from my Department.

Officials from my Department also meet with youth organisations on an individual basis when the need arises.

### **Irish Prison Service**

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she maintains dialogue with the Irish Prison Service with a view to providing appropriate support for first-time offender juveniles on their release from prison; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9237/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** There are no children detained in adult prisons. All children who have been sentenced to a period of detention by the Courts are detained in Oberstown Children Detention Campus. The policy to end children being detained in adult facilities has been achieved with effect from the 31st March 2017. In the circumstances, I do not need to liaise with the Irish Prison Service in relation to children.

### **Youth Services Funding**

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she has received requests from various voluntary youth organisations for funding to facilitate their various programmes throughout 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9238/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports volunteer-led youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. Each year, in the region of 1700 local youth clubs are eligible to apply under the scheme. Organisations wishing to apply for funding under this scheme are required to contact their local Education and Training Board for more information.

### **Child Protection**

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department and agencies under its aegis continue to monitor reports of children at risk throughout the country, whether in institutional care, foster care or homeless; the extent to which she can offer assistance in such situations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9239/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection, and if necessary, to receive a child into the care of the State.

The placement of children in care is governed by Regulations and National Standards. These provide for the welfare of the child, including their health, education, assessment of

need, care planning, supervision of placement, contact with family, general care practices, care records, and safety precautions. Children, depending on their identified needs, may be placed by in foster care either with relatives or general foster carers, in residential care, high support or special care or other placement types. The majority of children are placed in long term stable placements and currently over 92% of children are placed in foster care. A key part of the social worker role is to ensure the quality and safety of the child's placement, and to meet with the child on a one to one basis on all visits. There are safeguards surrounding each child care placement, whether foster or residential care and all placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker.

All foster care services and statutory residential centres are subject to inspection by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA). Private and voluntary residential centres are inspected by Tusla against National Standards. These inspection reports of children's residential centres, fostering services and child protection services are also reviewed and analysed by my officials. The overview of these reports provides me with a level of assurance on the overall capacity of Tusla to identify and provide services to families and children who are at risk.

Tusla has a dedicated Quality Assurance Team. This team produces monthly, quarterly and annual reports in respect of Tusla's functions, including detailed reporting on child safety and protection services. Tusla provides me with information on children in care, their placement type, care status and allocation of social workers. Within my Department there is a Unit which scrutinises these reports and briefs me and senior officials on issues of note. The reports also provide statistical evidence of improvements to child welfare and protection services and highlights challenges and areas where further improvement is required, such as the recruitment of additional social workers.

Officials from my Department meet Tusla management on a regular basis to review the level of service provision, including areas in need of improvement.

The Deputy should also be aware that children in care have access to independent advocacy supports, such as the organisation Empowering People in Care (EPIC). Children in care also have access to the complaints mechanism in Tulsa, and may make complaints, or be assisted to make complaints, about their care to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

In the context of the Child Care Act 1991, my Department has policy responsibility for children under 18 years of age who present as "out of home" without their parent or guardian. Children under the age of 16 who present as homeless without their parent or guardian are taken into care. Children aged 16 and 17 may be taken into care or provided with a service under section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991 which deals with accommodation for homeless children. Children who are homeless and in emergency accommodation are in the care of their parent or guardian. Where there are no welfare or protection concerns, Tusla's role is to provide family support, where this is required.

### **Misuse of Drugs**

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to monitor substance abuse among children of various ages with a view to the determination of the extent of the problem and the way in which to address it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9240/18]

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her attention has been drawn to evidence of dependency of prescription or other

drugs among children and youth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9242/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 207 together.

Although I have no function with regard to monitoring substance abuse in children, my Department provides funding to youth projects that are located in disadvantaged areas where a significant addiction problem exists or has the potential to develop. The objective is to attract “at risk” young people into activities and divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse. Youth Officers employed by the Education and Training Boards have close working relationships with youth services and they keep abreast of emerging trends, including alcohol and drug misuse and dependency. They have regular contact with Children and Young Persons Services Committees and I am advised that they use this platform to share information on emerging trends with their statutory counterparts, particularly Tusla.

I can further inform the Deputy that my attention has not been drawn to evidence of dependency of the type he describes.

If the Deputy has any question regarding dependency on prescription or other drugs, he should address any queries he may have to the Minister for Health, Mr. Simon Harris T.D.

### **Homeless Persons Supports**

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she can liaise with and offer assistance to homeless children whose parents may also be homeless; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9241/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** While the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has ultimate responsibility for managing homelessness, I am committed to helping children and families who are experiencing homelessness by making services and supports available that will bring some normality and structure to their lives. This is part of the whole-of-Government response to the problem of homelessness.

Where children are homeless as part of a family experiencing homelessness, my Department is working closely with Tusla to provide supports to mitigate the challenges faced by these parents and children.

Tusla works together with other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide services and supports to children, young people and families experiencing homelessness.

These include the introduction of free childcare for the children of families experiencing homelessness. As part of the scheme a daily meal is provided for each child, the cost of which is included in the subvention rate. The scheme is also designed to help those transitioning from homelessness to permanent accommodation.

Actions taken by Tusla include the provision of funding for child support workers and the appointment of a Homelessness Liaison Officer.

Family Resource Centres, part funded by Tusla, are working with people who are experiencing homelessness and many have developed local responses to the needs of families in emergency accommodation. These include, by way of example, family fun days, homework support, after school programmes, play therapy and transport services.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with homelessness and school attendance, Tus-

la's Educational Welfare Service offers a number of supports to children (and families) experiencing homelessness.

Tusla's joint protocol with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) covers child welfare and protection matters for children in emergency accommodation. It is fully operational in the DRHE areas and it is intended to replicate this protocol across the State. A Joint Working Protocol has been signed between Tusla and Galway City Council.

Finally, the DRHE is coordinating the development of a comprehensive National Quality Standards Framework for homeless services on behalf of all housing authorities. Consultation with service users and key stakeholders, including Tusla, has been undertaken and the draft standards have been piloted in selected services. These standards, including a child safety element which will provide homeless services with a framework for continuous quality improvement, will be implemented nationally.

It is important to note that Tusla only intervenes in family life in exceptional circumstances. Children who are with their families in emergency accommodation remain in the care of their parents or guardians. Where Tusla has concerns regarding the welfare and development of any child they will provide family supports to assist that family and child.

Ultimately, my concern is that we minimise and then eliminate the problem of homelessness. In the meantime, I will continue to support measures to help those affected, to the greatest degree possible within my area of responsibility.

*Question No. 207 answered with Question No. 205.*

### **Cyber Security Policy**

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate early warning systems exist to alert her Department to the threat to children and young persons of cyber grooming; the extent to which the issue can be combatted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9243/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department does not have a lead responsibility in this area and, accordingly, does not have specific measures of the type described by the Deputy.

Combatting online child grooming is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr. Charlie Flanagan T.D., and is addressed as part of a wide-ranging package of measures aimed at the reform of Ireland's criminal law on sexual offences, set out in Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017.

### **Departmental Staff**

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate staff remain available to the various sections of her Department with a view to ensuring the smooth and effective operation of all the services for which she is responsible; if particular issues have arisen or are likely to arise in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9244/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am satisfied that Department is adequately resourced to carry out its functions and services. Since my ap-

pointment as Minister, the staffing complement has grown from 181 to 248 people, with a further cohort currently being recruited which will bring the total staffing numbers to some 276 people before end 2018. The increase in staffing numbers reflects the continuing growth in the responsibilities of my Department, whose allocation has grown to €1.38 billion in 2018 following increases in the two Budgets since I took office.

As additional streams of work emerge in my Department, it is inevitable that, from time to time, temporary staffing shortfalls may occur. These are remedied at the earliest opportunity. I am satisfied that the workload required from my Department is adequately resourced and will continue to be. My Department's objectives continue to be delivered as planned and as scheduled and I anticipate that it will continue to do so.

### **Child Care Services**

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which support services are being made available to children that may be at risk as result of being undocumented non-nationals; the extent to which further measures are planned to protect such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9245/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In Ireland, the administration of the protection process, including Direct Provision and supports to asylum seekers, comes under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality. However, the Child Care Act, 1991, applies to all children resident in the State irrespective of their immigration status. Under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care or protection. Tusla provides support for these children for as long as their welfare requires it.

Children First National Guidance (2011) gives advice for notifying Tusla of situations where abuse is suspected. A range of professionals including teachers, nurses, early years educators, Gardaí and other health professionals, who see children regularly, are in a

good position to identify children at risk. Where someone has reasonable grounds for suspecting a child is being, or has been, abused, they are expected to immediately contact Tusla.

The Children First Act, 2015 places a statutory obligation on key professionals (mandated persons) to report concerns of harm above a defined threshold to Tusla without delay. These provisions were commenced on December 11th, last year.

When a child who is undocumented, and is living with his or her parent or guardian, is taken into care, their needs are given priority. A social worker is assigned to the child and prepares a care plan, in consultation with the child. The plan should be dynamic and

formally reviewed regularly. Intrinsic to this process is ensuring that the voice and best interest of the child are central. When outlined in the care plan, Tusla will assist the child with the process of establishing residency.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who seek the assistance of the State are placed in the statutory care of Tusla. Their needs are assessed by an allocated a social worker from a specialist team who work exclusively with unaccompanied minors. They receive appropriate educational, social, medical counselling support. In the course of 2017 140 unaccompanied children were received into Tusla care. Additionally, in the course of 2017 and January 2018, 36 children were received under the Calais Special Project.

Before travelling to Ireland, the Calais children were screened by the Gardaí and Department of Justice and Equality officials, and their residency status was approved.

Children who, with their parents, live in Direct Provision, are provided with welfare supports as required. Tusla have seconded an experienced social work team leader to the Department of Justice and Equality to liaise directly between Direct Provision and Tusla services.

### **Counselling Services Provision**

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she envisages improved counselling services for children at risk and their families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9246/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is required to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children. Tusla provides funding to voluntary organisations offering a range of counselling and support services to children and families including:

- Marriage and relationship counselling,
- Child counselling,
- Rainbows Peer Support Programme for children,
- Bereavement counselling and support on the death of a family member.

In 2017, Tusla provided funding of approximately €5.9 million to support organisations providing counselling services, the majority of which are voluntary. The organisations that are funded vary enormously in size and approach; some are dedicated counselling bodies, others provide counselling as part of a wider range of social and family services. These services provide support to families, children and young people. The funding provided by Tusla focuses on the development of support services in the community for families to enhance stability in family life and to assist children and families and their members in dealing with difficult periods in their lives.

Tusla's priority is to ensure that counselling services provide support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children and the effective functioning of families. Counselling services funded by Tusla are specifically targeted at children who have been affected by parental separation or who have suffered family bereavement. Tusla's marriage and relationship counselling funding is instrumental in assisting parents to deal with difficulties they experience in their personal relationships.

Mental health policy is under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Health, and Tusla works closely with other care providers including the Health Service Executive (HSE), in respect of access to child and adolescent mental health services.

Tusla will continue to work closely with service providers to support children and young people at risk and the effective functioning of families.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development**

212. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the spend on rural regeneration in each year since 2011; and the amount allocated for 2018, in tabular form. [9171/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department was established in July 2017 and therefore I do not have details of the amount spent on rural regeneration since 2011. Rural regeneration involves a coordinated effort across many Government Departments and agencies and each relevant Department has its own budgetary allocation to support rural renewal.

My own Department has a total allocation of €231.5 million for 2018 to support both rural and community development. This represents an increase of almost €70 million on 2017.

The Action Plan for Rural Development and the Government's new National Development Plan underpin a whole-of-Government approach to rural development. The Action 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.

The National Development contains details of capital investments which will support rural areas across a range of thematic objectives. The National Development Plan includes a commitment to establishing a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which will provide an additional €1 billion for rural renewal over a ten year period.

The objective of the new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will be to drive collaborative, co-ordinated and complementary packages of investment between Departments, agencies, local authorities and other public bodies in pooling their assets and working with local communities, and the private sector where appropriate, to transform our rural towns and villages and outlying rural areas.

The Action Plan for Rural Development, coupled with the investment under the National Development Plan, will bring an even greater focus to the regeneration of rural Ireland and make a real and lasting impact for the people who live in rural areas.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

213. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of officials and advisers that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9152/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I can confirm that I attended the official launch of Project Ireland 2040, in Sligo, on 16 February 2018. Minister of State Sean Kyne was also in attendance. Two officials and one advisor from my Department travelled to the launch. Any officials or advisors attending are entitled to claim the appropriate travel and subsistence allowance in compliance with Department of Finance travel and subsistence circulars, including Circular 11/82 Travelling and Subsistence Regulations and Circular 07/2009 Travel and Subsistence rates.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Payments**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment of jobseeker's allowance will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9026/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** According to departmental records the person concerned made a claim for jobseekers allowance on 22/12/2017. An officer of the department requested supporting documentation from the person concerned on 10/1/2018. To date no further contact or information has been received from the person concerned. The claim was closed due to outstanding documentation on 1/2/2018. It is open to the person concerned to make contact with their local Intreo Centre if they wish to pursue their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

### **Public Services Card**

215. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on concerns that have been expressed regarding the privacy implications of section 5 of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 in relation to the use of the public services card by certain bodies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9035/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Only bodies specified in legislation and currently included in Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) or their agents can ask for and use the Public Services Card (PSC).

The current proposal in Section 5 of the Social Welfare Bill does not change this. That protection will remain if the legislative proposal is adopted.

As the law currently stands, even if a card holder volunteers their PSC, a private sector organisation would be committing an offence by accepting it as they are not a “specified body”. Customer feedback is that they should be allowed to volunteer the card to non-specified bodies if it suits them to do so, for the purposes of ID verification such as when signing up to a utility company contract or opening an account with a financial institution. Customers often report that private companies insist on a State-issued photographic ID such as a Passport or Driver’s License which they might not have and which are costly. In contrast, the PSC is free of charge.

Therefore, the legislative proposal is that non-specified bodies that accept a PSC that is offered to them voluntarily by the holder should not be prosecuted or be at risk of prosecution. At the same time, such non-specified organisations should not be able to request or force a person to use their PSC - that would remain an offence. In other words, the volunteering of the card is the critical issue.

Furthermore, and for the sake of absolute clarity, this proposal in no way allows a private sector body to access the customer data on the card chip or on any government database - it would simply allow them to view/accept the card as a form of identity and to stop it being an offence for them to accept it.

This measure will be beneficial to holders of the PSC, most especially those who do not hold a driving licence or a passport. It is their identity and, as such, the holder should be allowed to volunteer it if they so choose, even in a commercial situation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

216. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9069/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the lady referred to on 17 November 2017. She was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 18 January 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal. As per your representation, the lady in question has changed address since her application. The decision has reissued to her current address, affording her the right of review and appeal within 21 days of date of the reissued letter.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

217. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 285 of 7 January 2018, if a person (details supplied) was sent correspondence advising them to apply for the State (contributory) pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9082/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** According to the records of my Department the person concerned was invited to make an application for state pension (contributory) in November 2013, in advance of their 66th birthday in March 2014. An application for state pension (contributory) was received from the person concerned on 25 April 2016. The person concerned was awarded a reduced rate pension, based on an assessed yearly average of 28 contributions covering the period from February 1967 to end-December 2013. The award of pension, which was backdated by six months to 25 October 2015, was notified in writing to the person concerned on 19 May 2016.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government recently announced proposals that pensioners who qualified for state pension (contributory) since September 2012, and whose rate of entitlement was impacted by the 2012 rate band changes, may apply for a review to have their entitlement considered under a new Total Contribution Approach (TCA). It will take some time to draft and pass the necessary legislation, and then develop the systems and procedures necessary to administer the new pension entitlement option. Accordingly, it is not necessary for any person to contact the Department about their situation. Instead, from late 2018, the Department expects to start inviting these pensioners to apply for a review under the new pension eligibility arrangements and to notify any periods spent caring for which HomeCaring credits may be due. Review applicants will be notified of the outcome of their review and any applicable higher rate of entitlement will be paid to them.

Payment of increases, where awarded, are expected to commence from early 2019 and will be backdated to the 30th March 2018.

I hope that this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Eligibility**

218. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a person's (details supplied) application for illness benefit; when payment will commence; if there was a delay in the processing of same; the reason a medical certificate signed by a doctor in the hospital was not acceptable; the reason the person was required to get and pay for a general practitioner to provide a medical certificate on their release from hospital;; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9124/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Injury Benefit is a weekly payment in respect of incapacity for work due to an accident arising out of and in the course of employment. For the purpose of the scheme, an accident while on an unbroken journey between one's normal place of residence and one's place of employment, is regarded as an accident at work. Benefit can be paid for up to 26 weeks from the date of the accident/injury/disease.

The person concerned made a claim to Occupational Injury Benefit which was registered on 31 January 2018. There is no payment for the first 6 days of Injury Benefit and no payment for Sundays. Claims are dealt with in chronological order and under normal circumstances it takes approximately two weeks from the date of registration to receive payment on a claim. The person concerned received a payment to their bank account on 12 February 2018.

In the first instance a letter from a hospital is required following a customer's treatment there. However a social welfare certificate is necessary in order to process a claim. The certificate can only be obtained from a G.P who is reimbursed from my Department. There is no charge to the patient for the cert. It is at discretion of the G.Ps whether to charge for a consultation.

### **Fuel Allowance Payments**

219. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the fuel allowance to entirely offset the higher cost of smokeless fuels after implementation of the smoky coal ban; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9126/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 27 weeks from October to April, to over 338,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household. On the 6th December 2017 my colleague the Minister of Communications, Climate Action and Environment announced that the ban on the sale of smoky coal in the existing zones, which has been in place in larger towns for some time, will be extended countrywide from autumn of 2018.

When the initial ban on smoky coal was introduced in larger towns my Department introduced a smog/smokeless allowance for the anticipated higher cost of smokeless fuel. However this was discontinued in 2011 as the price differential between smoky and smokeless coal has dropped considerably over the years. Smokeless fuel is also more energy efficient than conventional coal, more than offsetting any increase in cost. Research indicates that the efficiency gain can be up to 50%.

Taking this into account I have no plans at this time to increase fuel allowance to offset the higher cost of smokeless fuel. Any decision to do so would have to be considered in the context

of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to help identify people in energy poverty who are living with chronic respiratory conditions so they can avail of the Warmth and Wellbeing Scheme which aims to make homes warmer and healthier to live in.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

220. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of officials and advisers that travelled from her Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9149/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** One advisor, Ms Denise Duffy, travelled to Sligo with the Minister for Employment Affairs on Friday the 16th February 2018; as the advisor travelled with the Minister there are no associated additional costs.

### **Working Family Payment Eligibility**

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) qualifies for family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9254/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) formerly Family Income Supplement is a weekly tax free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. To qualify for WFP, a person must be engaged in full time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and must be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. It is also possible to combine hours of employment with a spouse, civil partner or cohabitant to meet the qualifying criteria. An applicant must also have at least 1 qualified child who normally resides with them or is maintained by them. A qualified child is a child under 18 years old or over 18 and under 22 years old who is attending full time day education. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a prescribed amount which varies according to the number of qualified children.

The person concerned has not applied for WFP to date.

An application form (FIS 1) was issued for completion on 20th February 2018.

The person concerned should complete and forward the application to the Department for processing.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9260/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 30 January 2018. The person concerned indicated at the oral hearing that he wished to submit further evidence in support of his appeal. On receipt of same the Appeals Officer will consider the appeal in the light of all of the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the oral hearing. The person concerned will be notified of the Appeals Officer's decision when the appeal has been determined. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer's allowance will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9261/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeals of the person concerned took place on 7th December 2017. At the oral hearing it was agreed that the person concerned would send in further documentation in support of the appeals and this has been reiterated in subsequent communications between the Appeals Officer and the person concerned. To date, the Appeals Officer has held off on making his decision on the appeals in order to provide the person concerned with the best opportunity to submit additional documentation in support of her case. However, in light of the time that has passed since the appeal hearing, he will be obliged to make his decision in the very near future with or without the promised additional documentation. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Local Authority Housing Mortgages**

224. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a site owned by a person planning to build their home on the site can avail of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan in part or in full towards the 10% deposit requirement in the context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9048/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I can confirm that the deposit requirements underpinning the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are the same for all applicants. Specifically, where a loan applicant owns a site with full planning permission, the maximum loan amount that can be advanced is 90% of the build cost. This is

also subject to the post construction market value of the completed house not exceeding the maximum allowable market values set at €320,000 in Dublin, Meath, Wicklow, Kildare, Louth, Cork and Galway and €250,000 in the rest of the country.

The applicant must provide bank or similar statements (post-office, credit union etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making a loan application showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings must be no less than 3% of the build cost. Gifts are permissible up to 7% of the build cost where their source is verified.

More information is available from [www.rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie](http://www.rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie) or by phoning 051 349 720.

### **Programme for Government**

225. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the programme for Government commitment to explore the possibility of enacting a constitutional right to housing; and the way in which the programme for Government commitment to allow the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government to examine the issue affected by the decision to request the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach to examine the broader issues of socio-economic rights decided upon by the Citizens' Assembly. [9051/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A motion to refer the Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution, which dealt with economic, social and cultural rights including the right to housing, to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach was passed by the Dáil on 28 September 2017 and by the Seanad on 11 October 2017.

As the Deputy will be aware, at the time that the Programme for a Partnership Government was being drawn up, it was considered that the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government would be the most appropriate Committee to consider this issue.

Given that the rights concerned include rights to social security, essential health care, rights of people with disabilities and linguistic rights, as well as a number of other rights in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, this was subsequently reconsidered and it was decided that the most appropriate Oireachtas Committee to consider this matter was the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach.

### **Urban Development**

226. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the national regeneration and development agency will have its headquarters outside of Dublin; the process by which the location of the headquarters of this body will be selected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9113/18]

230. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of officials and advisers that travelled from his Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9151/18]

232. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the €2 billion urban regeneration fund announced as part of the NDP additional to the

€11.6 billion announced in the NDP for social housing is planned to fund housing projects or other regeneration activities; and if so, the list of potential activities to be funded with this allocation. [9173/18]

234. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the establishment of the national regeneration and development agency; the estimated cost to establish and run this agency; the estimated staff complement of the agency; and the powers he will transfer to this agency. [9175/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 226, 230, 232 and 234 together.

The National Planning Framework sets out an ambitious high-level, national vision for Ireland for 2040, and provides the framework and principles to manage future population and economic growth over the next 20 years (catering for around 1 million extra people, 660,000 extra jobs and 550,000 extra homes).

The National Planning Framework and National Development Plan are also being followed by three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, being prepared by the Regional Assemblies over the course of 2018, which will link strategic planning and investment at the national level with the physical planning and local economic and community development functions of local authorities.

Project Ireland 2040 signals a significant policy shift towards securing more compact and sustainable urban and rural development which requires significantly more effective land management in key development areas.

Securing compact development will be substantially aided by a more effective approach to strategic land management and particularly so as regards land that is publicly owned and/or controlled. Accordingly, Project Ireland 2040 proposes the establishment of a National Regeneration and Development Agency to enhance overall management of the development potential of State lands to support implementation of the National Planning Framework. It is expected that the Agency will work with local authorities, public bodies and the business community, harnessing public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth.

The primary focus of the Agency will therefore be about capacity building, creating a national centre of expertise to support local authorities and agencies in working with wider community and business stakeholders and aiding the coordination of complex regeneration projects.

The detailed arrangements in relation to the establishment, location of headquarters, staff costs and powers of the Agency have yet to be fully determined. However, at this point it is envisaged that the organisation would be a tightly focused one which would seek to work through the statutory powers of the stakeholders it is being established to assist, such as the local authorities who already have extensive powers to acquire, compulsorily if necessary, lands for development.

Under Project Ireland 2040, my Department has been allocated responsibility for developing the €2 billion Urban Regeneration Fund which will support delivery of the NPF's growth enablers for cities and other large urban centres of 10,000+ population and complementing the €1 billion Rural Regeneration Fund being targeted at smaller towns and villages below this population threshold.

While specific projects and activities under this Fund have not yet been identified, my Department will be engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other

relevant Departments in the short term in drawing up the outline of and criteria for calls for competitive bids for seed funding that will leverage other public and private investment, based on proposals that meet some or all of the criteria as set out in the NPF.

Twelve officials of my Department, including Advisors, attended the launch in Sligo for briefing and administrative/organisational purposes. Costs associated with their attendance, which have yet to be finalised given the recent timing of the event, will be determined in accordance with Travel and Subsistence rules as set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports**

227. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress in implementing the final report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services regarding ensuring equal funding for rural and urban dwellers in relation to domestic water services and in particular to domestic waste water services and private wells; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9116/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In late 2017, my Department conducted a review of group water scheme subsidies. The review involved discussions with the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, the representative body of the group water sector. Discussions concluded in December, when I approved revised subsidy levels. The new subsidy arrangements, endorsed by a special delegate conference of the Federation on 13 December 2017, came into effect on 1 January 2018.

The changes implement the recommendation contained in the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services (JOCFFDWS), endorsed by both Houses of the Oireachtas in April 2017, that there be equity of treatment and equivalent financial support between households using public water services and those availing of private water services.

The revised subsidy levels are as follows:

1) For the annual subsidy towards the operation and maintenance costs of group water schemes providing a supply of water for domestic purposes (known as ‘Subsidy A’):

The maximum subsidy per house in private group water schemes has increased from €140 per household to €231. An increased maximum subsidy of €281 per household is available for small schemes of less than 100 houses that are willing, in the interests of providing in the long-term a more sustainable water supply to their members, to progress towards rationalisation or amalgamation with other schemes.

The maximum subsidy per house for public group water schemes has increased from €70 per household to €115. These are schemes that supply their members with water that is provided by Irish Water.

The portion of costs that can be recouped by group water schemes has also increased. Typically up to 60% of costs have been covered by the subsidy payments. This has increased to 85%. There are also changes and simplifications to how these costs are assessed.

2) For the additional subsidy that is paid towards the costs of group water schemes that have long-term Operation and Maintenance Contracts (for example, as part of a Design Build Operate project) for the delivery of water (known as ‘Subsidy B’):

There has been an increase in the level of volumetric costs incurred by group water schemes operating under these contracts that is recoupable, from 60% to 85%. This will allow for a greater portion of costs to be included within the subsidy payment.

In addition to the above, my Department is currently finalising proposals to increase the level of grant support for users of private wells, details of which I will be announcing shortly.

Separate to the initial review of group water scheme subsidy levels and also in fulfillment of the JOCCFDWS recommendations, I will shortly be establishing a working group to conduct a wider review of investment needs and rural water services. The review will focus on issues such as governance, supervision and monitoring of the sector, and capital investment requirements. It is anticipated that this group would engage with relevant stakeholders and will aim to complete its work by mid-2018.

Cognisance will be taken in this regard of any required measures to support the implementation of the finalised River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021, which I plan to finalise and publish early this year.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme Review**

228. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the outcome of the review of the tenant (incremental) purchase scheme; the reason for the delay in doing so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9120/18]

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

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. This required some further consultation with other Government Departments and for consideration to be given to possible implementation arrangements. These issues are close to being finalised and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

### **An Bord Pleanála**

229. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will request An Bord Pleanála to inform local authorities and public representatives when major infrastructure and housing developments are directly submitted through a regular e-mail newsletter or section of the board's website. [9144/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**

The strategic infrastructure development (SID) provisions in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2017 (the Regulations), whereby planning applications are made directly to An Bord Pleanála (the Board), provide for the necessary public notification, site notice and public consultation arrangements in respect of such planning applications, broadly similar to the arrangements in place in respect of planning applications for smaller development proposals.

Specifically, the SID provisions ensure the notification of the relevant planning authority at both pre-application and application stages of the process. In addition, as part of the application stage, the relevant planning authority must prepare a report setting out the authority's views of the proposed development, and elected members of the authority may attach recommendations to the report of the authority, prior to it being submitted to the Board.

The new procedures relating to applications for strategic housing developments (SHD) are similar to the provisions for SID, including the provisions relating to public notification, site notice and public consultation of any such proposals. The SHD procedures also ensure close involvement by the relevant planning authorities throughout the process, including - like the SID procedures - the requirement at application stage for the planning authority to submit a report on the proposed development to the Board. The Act further provides that at the application stage, the elected members of the relevant Local Area Committee or the local municipal district are also notified of an application for a proposed SHD development.

Additionally the regulations provide for a weekly list of applications received and applications determined or otherwise disposed of by the Board in relation to SID and SHD cases. These weekly lists are available on the Board's website at <http://www.pleanala.ie/>.

I am satisfied that there are appropriate notification procedures in place to ensure that planning authorities, public representatives and the wider public are informed of proposed SID and SHD planning applications.

*Question No. 230 answered with Question No. 226.*

### **Regeneration Projects Expenditure**

231. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the spend on urban regeneration in each year since 2011; and the amount allocated for 2018, in tabular form. [9172/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Spending specific and exclusive to an "urban regeneration" heading did not take place in my Department during the years in question. However, I have set out below the expenditure incurred under the National Regeneration Programme which operates under my Department's Social Housing Capital Investment Programme.

My Department currently supports a programme of large-scale regeneration projects in Dublin, Cork and Limerick and smaller projects in Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk under this National Regeneration Programme. These projects seek to address the causes of disadvantage in these communities through a holistic programme of physical, social and economic regeneration. Projects being funded under the Programme target the country's most disadvantaged communities, including those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. €61 million in Exchequer funding is being provided under this programme in 2018.

The expenditure on the National Regeneration Programme over the period 2011-2017 is set out in the table below

2011 - €m	2012 - €m	2013 - €m	2014 - €m	2015 - €m	2016 - €m	2017 - €m
118.19	100.62	69.43	46.88	48.80	50.05	65.19

In terms of urban regeneration specifically, and as announced in Budget 2018, a programme of €50 million in Exchequer funding, supplemented by an additional minimum 50% contribution from local authorities, is being introduced to support projects and initiatives to regenerate and revitalise depopulated urban areas and facilitate more compact urban growth. An initial €10 million is being made available in 2018 to get the programme underway. A key aim will be to maximise linkages with other programmes designed to bring vacant properties back into use.

In terms of the wider context, expenditure on urban regeneration was traditionally made through the Regional Operational Programmes, with the Urban and Village Renewal Measures involving a total planned EU and Exchequer co-financed expenditure of €154 million from 2000-2006. Budgetary constraints arising from the downturn in the economy caused the subsequent programme (2007-2013) to be deferred.

In the current programme covering the period 2014-2020, a Designated Urban Centre Grant Scheme is providing for investments in sustainable urban development, co-funded by the EU Regional Development Fund (with a contribution of €40 million) and the local authorities, in the order of €128 million over the 7-year period. This programme is supporting the delivery of 24 sustainable urban capital works projects around Ireland, which are expected to be completed by 2019, for the lasting benefit of local communities and improved quality of urban living.

Under Project Ireland 2040, my Department has been allocated responsibility for developing the €2 billion urban regeneration fund which will support delivery of the National Planning Framework's (NPF) growth enablers for cities and other large urban centres. Specific projects/activities under the fund have not yet been identified, and Departments and local authorities will be invited to make joint competitive bids for seed funding that will leverage other public and private investment, based on proposals that meet some or all of the criteria as set out in the NPF.

*Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 226.*

### Local Authority Housing Data

233. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the type of social housing units that the NDP plans to deliver out to 2027, that is, the number of the 112,000 units that will be owned by local authorities, approved housing bodies, leased from the private sector and short term RAS or HAP tenancies respectively. [9174/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** As reflected in the National Development Plan 2018 - 2027, a total of 112,000 social housing homes will be delivered over the next decade, through a range of mechanisms including build, long term leasing and acquisitions.

In addition to the social housing homes already delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, 40,000 further social housing homes will be delivered between 2018 and 2021, with the remaining 72,000 social housing homes being delivered between 2022 and 2027, at a rate of 12,000 homes per annum. In relation to the blend of social housing delivery between 2018 and 2021, details of this blend can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-progress-vs-targets-2016-2021/>.

In relation to the 72,000 social housing homes that will be delivered between 2022 and 2027, the precise delivery blend for each year will be finalised at a later stage.

It should be noted that the delivery of the 112,000 social housing homes over the next decade does not include housing supports that will be provided to households under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

*Question No. 234 answered with Question No. 226.*

## **EU Regulations**

235. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated impact a High Court ruling of 8 February 2018 (details supplied) will have on the harvesting of peat here; his plans to introduce the promised amending legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9194/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department is currently progressing draft European Union (Licensing of Large-Scale Extraction of Peat) Regulations that will establish a revised regulatory regime in respect of large-scale peat extraction. Under the draft Regulations, the Environmental Protection Agency will be required to carry out an environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of applications for a licence for peat extraction on sites of 30 hectares or more, and such activity will be exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

The draft regulations have been the subject of focused stakeholder input from relevant Government Departments and State bodies, industry representatives and environmental groups. Consultations are continuing with the Environmental Protection Agency with a view to finalising the draft Regulations for signature as soon as possible.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the impact on the harvesting of peat arising from the High Court ruling to which the Question refers given that neither I, as Minister, nor the State was a party to the case concerned and the period for appealing the ruling has not yet expired.

## **Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding**

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to implement changes to the three year multiannual rural water programme which would see two programmes approved per local authority area as was previously the case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9196/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I assume that the Deputy is referring to group sewerage schemes.

My Department's Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 includes funding of group sewerage schemes, through Measure 4(d) where clustering of households on individual septic tanks is not a viable option, particularly from an environmental perspective.

Local authorities were invited in January 2016 to submit bids under the programme. The invitation envisaged no more than two demonstration group sewerage schemes being brought

forward under the measure in any one year of the programme. The demonstrations will allow my Department, over the course of the programme, to determine the appropriate enduring funding levels and relationship with the current grant scheme.

An Expert Panel was convened by my Department to examine the 2016 bids from local authorities for projects under a number of the programme's measures, including 4(d) and to make recommendations on funding. The Panel recommended a priority list of demonstration schemes under this measure to my Department, which accepted the recommendations in full when approving the rural water allocation for 2016.

As only two demonstration projects can be advanced in any given year and a priority list of new demonstration group sewerage schemes has already been identified for the duration of the programme, there is currently no scope for any additional schemes.

A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under the programme is available on my Department's website at the following link:

*<http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues>.*

My Department will shortly initiate a short, focused review of the wider investment needs relating to rural water services, including the overall approach to funding rural water issues. The review will focus on governance, supervision and monitoring of the sector and the capital investment requirements. It is anticipated that the review group will engage with relevant stakeholders and will aim to complete its work by mid 2018. The process will inform preparations for a new multi-annual programme for the period 2019-2021.

### **Local Authority Funding**

237. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if budgetary applications by local authorities (details supplied) will be expedited in order that services can be planned for 2018. [9207/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Budget 2018 provides for a national Exchequer allocation of €116 million for homeless services, which is an additional €18 million, or 18%, on the Budget 2017 provision.

The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. My Department may recoup housing authorities up to 90% of payments reasonably made. Under funding arrangements that are in place between my Department and housing authorities, exchequer funding is provided on a regional basis, whereby payments are made to a designated lead-authority which is responsible for the disbursement of this exchequer funding, within the region. Housing authorities are currently in the process of submitting estimated 2018 expenditure programmes, which my Department will consider before notifying lead-authorities of delegated regional allocations.

As in previous years, the 2018 delegated regional funding allocations will be made primarily in respect of scheduled services, i.e. those where a service level agreement is in place between the authority and the service provider. Given the demand-led nature of homelessness and the increased rates of homeless presentation in recent times, it is recognised that it is not possible for authorities to be fully accurate in relation to forecast expenditure and additional expenditure may also arise outside of the provisions of the delegated funding allocations. Accordingly, this year, as in previous years, my Department has provided reassurance that all expenditure reason-

ably incurred will be considered for recoupment.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

238. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of officials and advisers that travelled from her Department to the launch of the NDP, NPF in County Sligo; the cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9157/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Government launched Project Ireland 2040, comprised of the National Planning Framework to 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018 - 2027 in Sligo on 16 February, following a meeting of the Government. The launch was also attended by my Special Adviser and the Assistant Secretary for Corporate Affairs from my Department.

The only costs arising for my Department in connection with its participation in these events will be standard travel and subsistence costs. These will be submitted for payment and processed in due course in accordance with procedures set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.