

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 11 to 22, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 23 to 32, inclusive, answered orally.

Rental Sector Strategy

33. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will amend the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 to require landlords to test for radon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19872/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, recognises that quality rental accommodation is critical to the success and sustainability of the residential rental sector and its attractiveness as a long-term accommodation option for households.

A key commitment in the Strategy was to review the regulations governing minimum standards in rented accommodation, to bring them into line with modern requirements. That review has been completed and on 27 January 2017, the then Minister signed the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017. These regulations focus on tenant safety and include new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety. With very limited exemptions, these apply to local authority and voluntary housing units as well as private rented residential accommodation.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with the regulations. Responsibility for enforcement rests with the relevant local authority.

The purpose of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 is to provide a basis standard for decent, safe and secure accommodation. Policy measures relating to radon detection and remediation are primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. At this stage, I have no plans to amend the regulations to introduce mandatory radon testing in rented accommodation but I will keep the matter under review.

Questions Nos. 34 and 35 answered orally.

Proposed Legislation

36. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the water abstraction licensing regime legislation as required by the water framework directive. [19785/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Water Framework Directive requires that abstractions of surface water or ground water which are likely to have a significant effect on water status must be regulated. In December 2017, the Government approved the commencement of work on a General Scheme of a Water Environment (Abstractions) Bill which will govern the abstraction of water in a proportionate and efficient way.

I intend to return to Government in the coming weeks with a draft General Scheme of this Bill. A public consultation process will then be launched and the outcome of that consultation will inform the further development of the Bill.

While no decisions will be made on any proposals in this regard until the public consultation is complete, I expect that a proportionate abstraction control regime can be developed that will effectively manage abstraction risks and pressures without imposing an unnecessary regulatory burden. Ireland has relatively low abstraction pressures with 6% of water bodies nationally having had abstraction pressures identified by the Environmental Protection Agency as potentially posing a risk to the bodies' environmental objectives. I expect that any control regime will focus on the most significant abstraction volumes and pressures, recognising that the Directive does not require the registration and licensing of private wells serving individual domestic dwellings.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 28.

Rental Sector

38. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the income criteria for the cost of rental pilot projects being undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19849/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Against the background of the affordability pressures which currently exist in the rental market, the Government is determined to make cost rental a major part of the Irish housing system, similar to the role it plays in many other European countries. Under this approach, rents are set at levels to recover the construction costs and to facilitate the management and administration of developments, but with only a minimal profit margin included.

A pilot project is currently being progressed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, at Enniskerry Road in Dundrum, in conjunction with the Housing Agency and Approved Housing Bodies, using land owned by the Agency.

Learning from the initial experiences in the pilot scheme, my Department is working with the European Investment Bank and other key stakeholders with a view to developing the first major cost rental project in Dublin city. Initial feasibility analysis is underway with a view to identifying a major project for immediate progression, with a broader programme of cost rental projects across Dublin and other cities to follow.

I announced new measures in January of this year that are specifically targeted at delivering more affordable homes to households generally with maximum income of €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for joint applicants. The income criteria for access to a cost rental

scheme will take into account the broader policy development on affordable housing.

Homeless Persons Supports

39. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the rising number of elderly persons that are now homeless; his further plans to arrest the escalation of the number of persons in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19695/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities.

The March homelessness report published last week shows that 2% of the 6,035 adults accessing emergency accommodation during March were aged 65 or over. While the proportion of homeless adults who are in this age category has remained relatively static since we began collating this information in 2014, numbers have risen overall, in line with increases in presentations across all demographics, and there are now 49 more people over 65s in emergency accommodation than there were in December 2014.

The long-term housing needs of families and individuals, including the elderly, who are in emergency accommodation, will be met through a range of social housing supports such as the Housing Assistance Payment scheme and through general social housing allocations. Significant progress is being made and in 2017 4,729 individuals exited emergency accommodation into independent tenancies, a 54% increase on the 3,079 recorded in the previous year.

It is a priority for me and my Department to continue to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. In addition, the issue of housing for older people more generally will be addressed in a joint policy statement between my Department and the Department of Health, which will be published this summer.

40. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the range of statutory powers that will be afforded to the new borough councils which will be created by his Department; and if financial autonomy will be afforded to them. [19835/18]

Local Government Reform

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Programme for a Partnership Government (PPG) sets out a number of requirements in relation to local government reform. In particular, the PPG envisages the submission of a report to Government and the Oireachtas on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy.

Proposals to address a number of the PPG requirements have been the subject of consideration by Government. Among the issues addressed in this context is municipal governance, including the questions of town or borough status and local electoral areas, as referenced in the PPG. Following recent consideration by Government, a paper on this matter has been referred

to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, and Local Government, for consideration.

The draft paper contains proposals for enhanced urban governance in the local government system, including strengthening the role of the relevant municipal district members in areas such as financial and budgetary matters, economic, social and cultural regeneration and development of towns, and co-ordinating and prioritising investment in that regard. I understand that the Joint Committee will consider this and other papers on local government matters pursuant to the PPG at a meeting on 31 May.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

41. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which his Department provides social housing in line with *A Vision for Change*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19625/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Policy responsibility for *A Vision for Change*, the strategy which sets out the direction for Mental Health Services in Ireland and which is being implemented by the HSE in conjunction with other agencies, is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health.

The current *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability* and associated *National Implementation Framework*, were jointly published by my Department and the Department of Health. They set out the Government's broad framework for the delivery of housing for people with disabilities through mainstream housing policy and were developed as part of a coherent framework, in conjunction with the Government's mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, and the *Congregated Settings Report*. The partnership approach adopted under the Strategy recognises that the provision of suitable housing is only one element in supporting people with disabilities to live fully inclusive lives.

Implementation of identified actions in the *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability* is being driven primarily by the Housing Agency, through a dedicated sub-group comprising representatives from my Department, the HSE, Department of Health, local authorities, the Irish Council for Social Housing and various disability representative organisations. Through that forum, a Steering Group was established last year to progress actions in relation to meeting the housing needs of people with a mental health disability. Following completion of a final review of a pilot project trialling a tenancy support officer for a number of individuals transitioning from HSE owned mental health facilities in Laois/Offaly, in January this year my Department approved a funding contribution of 50% towards tenancy sustainment costs to support the national roll-out of this project over the three year period 2018 to 2020. The remaining 50% of costs are being funded by the HSE, with the approval of the Department of Health. My Department will continue to work with the HSE on housing needs for individuals experiencing mental health issues and for those who require additional housing supports.

Social and Affordable Housing

42. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his definition of affordable housing; the way in which he will ensure that homes built on publicly owned land will be affordable to persons who are excluded by market prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19790/18]

78. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his definition of affordable housing; the number of units he plans to provide in this category in the next period; the way in which these units will be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19837/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 78 together.

The delivery of more affordable homes, to buy or rent, particularly in areas where people are facing the greatest affordability challenge, is a major priority for Government. While there is no single universally accepted definition of housing affordability, the widely used internationally accepted benchmark is that households, particularly low- to moderate-income households, should ideally not be paying much more than one third of their disposable income on accommodation costs.

Of course, affordability and access to affordable housing are significantly influenced by the supply of homes to buy and rent and competition in the market. Therefore, the Government has taken significant action to increase housing supply through the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness . This is having a significant impact, particularly for those on lowest incomes, with nearly 26,000 households having their social housing needs met in 2017, significantly ahead of target.

More generally and in order to increase overall house-building at scale, a suite of actions are underway, including, for example, actions to fund infrastructure, streamline planning, and reduce building costs. There is evidence that these measures are working with housing planning permissions and commencements growing by 27% and 41% respectively on an annual basis, based on the latest published data.

There is also evidence of large-scale residential developments securing planning permission through the new fast-track Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process in An Bord Pleanála.

The Government is committed to ensuring that housing is affordable for households on low to moderate incomes. Recognising that people want a choice of affordable purchase and rental, depending on their stage of life and circumstances, we are progressing both through a range of initiatives.

I announced new measures in January specifically targeted at delivering more affordable homes to households generally with maximum income of €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for joint applicants. Based on initial estimates, the initiatives have the potential to deliver more than 3,000 new affordable homes to buy or rent, with a target delivery of at least 10,000 new affordable homes in the medium term. The emphasis initially will be on delivering affordable homes from the public land bank, particularly in urban areas where affordability issues are greatest.

Recognising that there are enabling infrastructure requirements on some sites, I am also providing Exchequer funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, as a key contribution towards the delivery of more affordable housing from local authority land.

Homeless Persons Data

43. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the latest homeless figures; the councils that have discrepancies in their figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19781/18]

61. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the breakdown of the recently claimed overstatement of homelessness of 600, by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19838/18]

68. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that returned incorrect data to his Department in relation to homeless figures for January and February 2018; his views on the accuracy of the figures announced on 30 April 2018 in relation to March 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19789/18]

69. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that local authorities are providing accurate data to his Department in relation to housing and homelessness figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19796/18]

70. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason he plans to amend the reporting of homeless figures from monthly to quarterly; and if he will clarify his announcement that the homeless figures are 500 to 600 less than the official reports. [19782/18]

86. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the latest homeless figures; the reason he is of the view these figures have been overstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19866/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43, 61, 68, 69, 70 and 86 together.

My Department currently publishes data on a monthly basis on the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities, produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The reports are collated on a regional basis.

During the compilation of the March Homeless Report, in the course of examining data from local authorities, my Department established that a number of local authorities had mis-categorised individuals accommodated in houses and apartments, owned or leased by the local authorities, including in some instances people renting in the private rented sector but in receipt of social housing supports, as being in emergency accommodation. As these issues have not yet been fully addressed, I am not in position to provide a complete account of the extent of such practices. My Department is writing to local authorities as part of its continuing examination of the matter.

However, I can say that a total of 247 adults and 331 associated dependents, residing in houses and apartments, were categorised as being in emergency accommodation in the Dublin, South-West, Mid-West, North-East and South-East Regions. These categorisations were corrected prior to the publication of the March report. I flagged the issue that had arisen very clearly when publishing the March figures and was also clear that the figures would have been higher had the corrections I referred to not been made.

My priority as Minister is to ensure that families and individuals are moved from emergency accommodation, such as hostels, hotels and family hubs, into housing. I am satisfied that individuals and families who are being accommodated in publicly funded houses or apartments, whether it be social housing or homes leased from the private rented sector, should not be considered as living in emergency accommodation.

The issues which have emerged indicate clearly to me that we need improved reporting in

this area in order to accurately reflect the numbers of households in emergency accommodation so that we can measure our progress and target our further policies and actions. My Department is examining the current reporting arrangements with a view to ensuring that the best possible data is available to support policy making. No decision has been taken on amending the existing arrangements at this stage.

Housing Provision

44. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to fast-track the development of housing on local authority owned, State owned or State controlled land that is zoned for residential development. [19843/18]

53. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the zoned land owned by the 31 local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19862/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 53 together.

The development of residential lands owned by local authorities and the Housing Agency, for social housing and, where appropriate, for mixed-tenure developments, is a major priority under the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. To this end, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to accommodate some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in the ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. All of the mapped sites can be viewed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

To date, State-led residential construction has been primarily aimed at helping to meet the needs of households in the lowest income brackets, i.e. for social housing. With increased Exchequer investment to deliver 50,000 new social homes by 2021, the significant expansion of the social housing build programme is evident in the Quarter 4 2017 Social Housing Construction Status Report, which was published on 19 April. The programme includes 850 schemes (or phases) at the end of last year, delivering over 13,400 homes, a very substantial increase on the 8,430 homes in the programme a year earlier. The full report can be accessed at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>.

In relation to the delivery of affordable homes, I am re-introducing an affordable purchase scheme, under the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and I am determined to establish a substantial cost rental sector, in order to close the affordability gap in housing on a sustainable and long-term basis.

Local authorities are already progressing a number of large mixed-tenure developments on their sites, encompassing large volumes of social, affordable and private market housing. For example, Dublin City Council has two sites, at O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road, being developed on the basis of a 30% social; 20% affordable and 50% private market housing mix, with capacity to deliver over 1,200 new homes. South Dublin County Council is also progressing one of its major sites at Kilcarbery, capable of yielding almost 1,000 new homes on a 30% social and 70% private tenure mix.

In order to aid local authorities further in delivering affordable housing from their sites, I am providing funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned lands specifically for affordable homes to buy or rent. Overall, initial estimates suggest that around 3,000 new affordable homes can be made available through a range of schemes and initiatives, with the long-term ambition for some 10,000 additional affordable homes to be provided for sale or rent, as the full range of initiatives are rolled out.

In addition, in order to relieve critical infrastructure blockages and enable housing developments to be built on key local authority and private sites at scale, total funding of €266 million is being allocated under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). To date, I have given final approval for 30 projects under LIHAF, at a cost of some €195 million, which will activate supply of almost 20,000 homes. Grant agreements in respect of those projects have been signed. A second call for proposals will be issued shortly to invite eligible applications for the additional funding.

Finally, from a longer-term strategic perspective, as part of Project Ireland 2040, the Government announced on 16 February its intention to establish a new National Regeneration and Development Agency, which will have a role in managing the State's wider publicly-owned land bank to ensure that overall development needs, including housing, are met. This will involve working primarily with the relevant local authorities, other public bodies and the private sector, with the scope to assemble and rationalise land holdings, whether they are publicly or privately owned, in order to enable the re-purposing of lands that may not be currently used optimally, with regard to wider and long-term public policy and planning objectives.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

45. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to greatly expand the mortgage to rent scheme to obviate the sale of family homes by banks to vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13632/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My focus, and that of the Government, is to ensure that as many households as possible remain in their homes and in this regard, a range of measures are currently being implemented across Government Departments and agencies. These actions are focused on encouraging those in mortgage distress who have not been able to engage, to reach a long term debt resolution and avoid repossession if possible.

The Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme introduced in 2012 and administered by the Housing Agency on behalf of my Department is targeted at those households in arrears who are eligible for social housing support, whose mortgage is unsustainable. The MTR scheme is an established part of the overall suite of social housing options and an important part of the mortgage arrears resolution process.

A Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the MTR scheme in order for it to work better for borrowers. The Review, available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the avenues and impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households. I am providing an additional €5m for the MTR scheme in 2018, which will support at least 250 additional MTR cases to be completed by

AHBs working together with lenders using the MTR scheme. Additional resources can be made available to the Scheme in 2018, if required.

The MTR Review also concluded that the current financial model of the scheme may not, in its current configuration, be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. In order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency initiated a call for Expressions of Interest from bodies other than approved housing bodies (AHBs) interested in participating in a new MTR pilot scheme. Two submissions were received by the Housing Agency in response to the Expressions of Interest request. The EOI process is still on-going and I expect to be in a position to announce the outcome in the near future.

It is important also to highlight that there are no changes to the rights or obligations of a customer whose loan is sold by a bank. The Government introduced the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 to ensure that borrowers whose loans are sold retain the same protections which they had prior to the sale. In addition, as credit servicing firms servicing loans on behalf of unregulated entities are required to comply with the statutory Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA), all protections under the CCMA are unchanged.

Traveller Accommodation

46. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the appointment of an expert group to review the legislation underpinning the Traveller accommodation programmes. [19787/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In line with the commitment in Rebuilding Ireland, in 2017 the Housing Agency commissioned an expert, independent review of funding for traveller-specific accommodation to date. This review had regard to targets contained in the local authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes and actual units delivered, the current status of accommodation funded and funding provided for accommodation maintenance and other supports.

Following its consideration of the review, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee agreed to the establishment of an Expert Group to examine and make recommendations on issues regarding Traveller accommodation policy, strategy and implementation. The Committee also recommended that a review of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 should be undertaken as part of the work of the Expert Group. I welcome and support such a review given that the Act is operational 20 years this year.

The Committee played a key role in determining the terms of reference for the Expert Group which have recently been finalised. It is my intention to establish the group as soon as possible with a view to it concluding its work within a short timeframe. My Department will consider any recommendations made by the Expert Group to improve the delivery of Traveller accommodation nationally and to ensure that full use is made of the increasing level of funding available for investment in Traveller accommodation.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

47. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications for social housing projects which have been submitted by Westmeath County Council and Longford County Council; and the stage they are at. [19853/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

My Department publishes information on social housing construction projects via quarterly Construction Status Reports. The most recently available report, which sets out the position at end 2017 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>, provides project and stage details for all local authority areas, including Westmeath and Longford. It also includes new social housing construction projects being delivered by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in partnership with the local authorities.

Since the period covered by the last published Construction Status Report, further construction projects have been approved and existing projects have advanced across many local authority areas, including Westmeath and Longford. This includes new local authority projects to construct 31 new social homes at Lanesborough, via a turnkey arrangement, and a 32 home project at Ennel Court, Mullingar which has been approved to have full design finalised for tendering. Projects are also being advanced on behalf of Westmeath and Longford County Councils by AHBs.

Both the local authorities and AHBs are also continuing to acquire new social homes, including vacant properties, both through permanent purchase and through long-term leasing. My Department is working closely to support both the local authorities and the AHBs with the funding of these schemes.

I recently wrote to all local authorities, including Westmeath and Longford, setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021. Details of these targets are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

Regional Assemblies

48. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review the administrative support given to regional assemblies in view of their role in the national planning framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19850/18]

461. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review the administrative support provided to the regional assemblies in view of their role under the national planning framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20092/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 461 together.

The three Regional Assemblies were established further to the Local Government Reform Act 2014 and comprise representation from the constituent local authorities in the Eastern and Midland (Dublin, the Mid-East and Midlands), Northern and Western (North-West, West and Border) and Southern (Mid-West, South-West and South-East) regions. The requisite staffing structure was formalised for each of the three Regional Assemblies to administer and carry out their functions.

Implementation of Project Ireland 2040 will be progressed at the regional level by the three Regional Assemblies who have responsibility for co-ordinating, promoting and supporting the strategic planning and sustainable development of their regions, consistent with the objectives

of the National Planning Framework (NPF), through the preparation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). Recognising the critical role that the Regional Assemblies have in the ongoing implementation of the NPF, my Department has been engaging with the three Assemblies on an ongoing basis throughout the formulation and publication of the NPF and preparations of the corresponding RSES.

I am confident that the Assemblies are currently adequately equipped to fulfill their role in the RSES process, and in the general implementation process of the NPF at the regional and local levels, in consultation with my Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and local authorities, supported by the dissemination of any further advice and guidance as required. However, I will keep the matter under regular review.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

49. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the specific measures he is taking to speed up the delivery of social homes; if he has analysed the data from the Rebuilding Ireland quarterly reports in relation to the number of units approved that are still in the pre-construction phases of approval; the measures in place to progress these to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19788/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Notwithstanding the genuine challenges that arise with construction projects of all types, I and my Department have been consistently focused on ensuring that progress is made to achieve housing delivery as quickly as possible.

My Department has worked with local authorities to review the processes and procedures for the approval of social housing construction projects and has agreed an overall target programme of 59 weeks for progressing typical social housing construction projects from initial project conception through design, planning and procurement up to contractors going on site.

More detailed guidelines have been prepared in relation to submissions to be made to my Department. The single-stage approval process for projects under €2m has been revised and my Department is working with local authorities to increase take-up. Rapid build approaches are also increasingly being used, which can save time in relation to design, procurement and construction of new social housing.

My Department also has continuous contact with local authorities around all forms of housing delivery, including regular technical meetings to review progress in respect of social housing projects and to clear any blockages as swiftly as possible.

The Deputy can be assured that my Department is committed to the accelerated delivery of all social housing projects and will work with all local authorities and approved housing bodies to ensure that quality and value for money projects are delivered efficiently and effectively. This is evident from the significant increase in new build social housing activity in 2017 and the further significant increase targeted for this year.

My Department has also established a dedicated Housing Delivery Office to support local authorities in housing delivery and this support is now an important part of the focus on accelerating housing delivery on key sites, identifying further mechanisms to accelerate delivery and supporting the roll-out of complex construction projects.

50. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of rapid build housing units that have been constructed to date as outlined in Action 1 of Rebuilding Ireland; the reason for the delays; the number of these units expected to be completed by the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19672/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 208 rapid delivery homes were completed by end 2017. There are currently some 24 further rapid delivery schemes, due to yield in excess of 653 social homes, at various stages of advancement, 283 of which are scheduled for delivery in 2018.

Many of the issues around delivery that ‘standard’ social housing construction projects face, are also faced by rapid build projects, such as preparing sites, services/access to the site, community consultation, planning, etc. There are, however, savings in terms of design and construction and these advantages are growing as more use is made of the Office of Government Procurement framework contract and contractors gain more experience in implementing these projects. Under this mechanism, acceleration is delivered both by the use of the Design and Build services of these contractors and reduced construction time periods due to considerable off site fabrication. This framework is available for all local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to use.

While the framework, or indeed off-site construction, may not be suitable for all developments or sites, my Department continues to encourage and support local authorities and AHBs to consider the rapid delivery mechanism in the interest of accelerated delivery. In this regard my Department has organised information seminars for local authorities, as well as visits to rapid delivery projects under construction. Local authorities have been asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are suitable for early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

In addition, Dublin City Council is developing a volumetric rapid build housing programme of apartment developments. This could yield in excess of 700 homes and my Department is working very closely with the Council to prioritise some of the larger apartment schemes, given the current demand.

Updated details in relation to the programme of rapid build projects are included in each Social Housing Construction Projects Status Report, which are published on a quarterly basis on the Rebuilding Ireland website; the most recent report setting out the position at end-2017, is available at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>.

The progress evident in this report, together with new build social housing achieved through Part V, ensured that 2,297 new build social housing homes were delivered in 2017, over three times the delivery in 2016 and very close to the 2,434 target set for 2017.

My Department will continue to work with local authorities to maximise delivery and harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units over the course of the Rebuilding Ireland Plan, including through rapid delivery schemes.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

51. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of newly built social housing units built directly by local authorities in 2017; the

way in which this figure is in line with the stated goal of solving the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19836/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 50,000 social housing homes will be delivered through build, acquisition and leasing programmes. In addition to this, 87,000 additional households will be supported through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

The combination of 50,000 social housing homes and 87,000 HAP and RAS social housing supports, which will be funded by the Government out to 2021, means that over 137,000 long term and flexible options will be made available to those on the housing waiting lists under Rebuilding Ireland. There are currently 86,000 households on social housing waiting lists.

I recently wrote to all local authorities setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021. Details of these are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

The Government, working with the local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and other delivery agents, is already exceeding the delivery targets set for the first two years of Rebuilding Ireland. Of the combined target of 137,000 referred to above, just under 45,000 households have had their housing need met by the end of year 2 of the Rebuilding Ireland Plan – 33% of those targeted under the 6 year Plan as a whole.

Detailed data in relation to social housing delivery by each local authority for 2017, including units built directly by local authorities is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1b1-la-bld-by-area_10.xlsx .

My Department will continue to work with local authorities to maximise delivery and also harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units in 2018, including through turnkey schemes.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

52. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units he expects to come on stream in the next year in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19797/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I recently wrote to all local authorities, including Tipperary County Council, setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021.

In the case of Tipperary County Council, they have a target to deliver 117 new social homes in 2018 through build, acquisition and long-term leasing initiatives, with a further 154 families or individuals to be housed through the Housing Assistance Payment or the Rental Accommodation Schemes. I am keen to see Tipperary County Council and all other local authorities meet or, indeed, exceed these targets and have assured them that funding is available to

support them in that regard. Full details of the targets for all local authority areas, including Tipperary, are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

My Department also publishes information of the construction of new social housing via quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Reports. The most recently available report can be seen on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>. This shows activity up to end-2017 and, since then, local authorities will have advanced further projects through approval onto site, with new projects also being added to the pipeline.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 44.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

54. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the tenant purchase scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19747/18]

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 has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements.

These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Housing Provision

55. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if plans will be approved for additional housing in County Laois incorporating social housing, affordable housing and private housing in the event of the county council bringing proposals forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19636/18]

71. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department approves new affordable housing schemes in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19637/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I

propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 71 together.

The Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is firmly focused on increasing supply and the priority for Government attention is to support those in society with the greatest housing access and affordability challenges. In that context, the focus is on meeting the housing needs of those in the lower-income categories, particularly those in need of social housing supports and other households that are most challenged from an affordability perspective, such as first-time buyers. The significant progress being made in these areas is outlined on the Rebuilding Ireland website at www.rebuildingireland.ie.

In Budget 2018, the social housing allocation was increased to over €6 billion for the lifespan of Rebuilding Ireland, with a target of 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered by 2021, and some 87,000 households to be supported through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme. In 2017, almost 26,000 households had their social housing need met, significantly ahead of the target set.

I recently wrote to all local authorities, including Laois County Council, setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021. Details of these are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

In respect of social housing build targets for 2018, a strong pipeline is already in place for local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to deliver on these targets. The 2018 build target is for the delivery of 4,969 additional social housing homes, including 3,819 local authority and AHB build units. The Quarter 4 2017 Construction Status Report, which is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>, provides details of projects on a local authority by authority basis.

I announced new housing affordability measures in January of this year. We are targeting both affordable purchase and rental units to be delivered initially from local authority housing land-banks, with the potential to deliver more than 3,000 new affordable homes to buy or rent initially, with a target delivery of at least 10,000 new affordable homes in the medium to longer term.

Delivery of affordable homes will require local authorities to maximise the potential delivery of new homes from their land bank. This may include mixed-tenure developments on appropriate sites and my Department will continue to work with Laois County Council and all local authorities with regard to any social and mixed-tenure housing proposals that they bring forward, in order to maximise delivery and also harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units in 2018.

Planning Issues

56. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the purpose of a recent circular sent to local authorities in relation to the rights of councillors to comment on planning matters which referred to the Planning and Development Act 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19791/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The purpose of Circular PL02/2018, which issued to planning authorities on 9 March 2018, was to remind planning authorities and elected members that they are required to consider planning

applications in accordance with the open, transparent and verifiable written process, set down in planning legislation. The circular also highlights that planning authorities, when making their decisions, are restricted to considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned.

The circular indicates that, while the Development Management Guidelines issued to planning authorities under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, recognise that elected members may be informed by planning staff of factual matters relating to particular planning applications, the provision of such information is intended to inform elected members who may wish to make substantive comments on planning applications by way of formal written submissions or observations to the planning authority.

In this regard, the circular points out that discussion of the merits of individual planning applications at Municipal District and Area Committee meetings or at full Council meetings does not form part of the statutory process for the consideration of planning applications, and that the practice could be viewed as an attempt to undermine due process and exert undue influence on the planning authority to make a decision that would not be in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. The circular also states that the practice of discussing planning applications at relevant Council meetings could convey an erroneous impression to the public of the role of elected members in the statutory process for deciding on planning applications.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

57. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homes priced between €170,000 and €280,000 that will be delivered under the local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF. [19786/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The overall aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund is to increase housing supply by removing infrastructural obstacles that were preventing the development of key sites.

I have approved funding of €195 million for 30 public infrastructure projects under the first phase of LIHAF. I expect that these projects will activate delivery of up to 20,000 housing units by 2021. Over 28% of these will be social or affordable homes. A further 28% will have a LIHAF related cost reduction from their normal open market value.

I published details of the 30 approved projects on 28 March 2018, including estimates of unit numbers and indicative prices for the areas, as submitted to my Department by local authorities. This information is available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/>.

It is not possible to give the Deputy specific details on units in the price range requested, particularly as many of the projects are still progressing through the planning system, and exact details on the breakdown of unit types across projects are not yet available. However, as can be seen in the tabular information published, based on current prices, many of the projects outside Dublin are expected to have housing available in the price bracket identified by the Deputy.

In Dublin, it is expected that there will be a supply of smaller units on many of the sites at prices under €320,000 and in the bracket identified, with the quantum of these homes dependent on the housing mix granted within the planning permissions.

Projects in Dublin, such as those at Adamstown and Kilcarbery, will provide a significant boost to the supply of more affordable homes in Dublin. More generally, the accelerated de-

livery and scale of the housing supply increase, in terms of the numbers of new homes planned from these sites, will be key to addressing the overall supply issue that is affecting house prices.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

58. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the social housing delivery targets set for each local authority are a maximum or a minimum to achieve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19812/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): One of the key outcomes of the second Housing Summit that I held with local authority Chief Executives earlier this year was a commitment to drive greater transparency and accountability at individual local authority level on the delivery of the targets under Rebuilding Ireland.

In this regard, I recently wrote to all local authorities setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021. Details of these are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

Rebuilding Ireland, together with initiatives announced on foot of the targeted review of progress which was undertaken last year, as well as additional measures announced under Budget 2018, provides a robust framework for addressing the housing and homelessness challenges we face. My Department's focus, and that of all delivery agents, will remain on implementation and delivery to ensure that the range of objectives and targets set are achieved. A wide range of delivery mechanisms and a funding commitment of €6 billion over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland have been put in place to support the achievement of these targets.

Rebuilding Ireland is modelled on blended delivery across the main programmes of build, acquisition and leasing. While it is recognised that the pace of delivery, particularly under build activity, may vary from local authority to local authority, the range of delivery options available, combined with the support structures outlined, provide the necessary resources for local authorities and I expect all stakeholders to be fully mobilised towards meeting the target for 2018, and subsequent years.

The targets set are minimum targets for local authority delivery. I have always been clear that where potential social housing units are available and represent value for money and meet all of the other social housing delivery requirements, my Department will support local authorities to pursue such opportunities to provide additional accommodation for those on local authority housing lists.

Rental Sector

59. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation to outlaw so-called renovictions (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19839/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Security of tenure provisions under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 apply once a tenant has been in occupation of a dwelling for a continuous period of 6 months, with no notice of termination having been served during that time. On completion of the 6-month occupation,

the tenant is entitled to specific protections under the Residential Tenancies Act as long as the tenant complies with their own obligations. One of the protections relates to the tenant's entitlement to remain in occupation for up to 4 years from the commencement of the tenancy, where the tenancy commenced prior to 24 December 2016, and for up to 6 years, where the tenancy commenced on or after 24 December 2016.

Section 34 of the 2004 Act provides that a landlord must state a reason for the termination of a tenancy in any notice served.

It is important to note that, where a tenancy is terminated for the purposes of substantial refurbishment or renovation, if the property is complete and available for re-let within 6 months of the termination, it must be offered for letting back to the original tenant.

The landlord must confirm that the existing or current tenant has the option of commencing a new tenancy in the refurbished or renovated dwelling, if it becomes available within 6 months from the end of the notice period given (or if there is an RTB dispute on the validity of the notice, within 6 months of the end of that dispute). The duty to offer a new tenancy arises where the tenant has provided contact details.

Where a tenant considers that their tenancy may have been terminated under false pretences, such as, for example, where the reason cited is that the landlord intends to substantially refurbish/renovate, yet the tenant sees the dwelling subsequently advertised for letting with no obvious works having been completed, or is not offered first refusal of the rented dwelling within 6 months of the termination having supplied up-to-date contact details, they can take a case to the RTB. Section 56 of the Residential Tenancies Act provides for the award of damages for abuse of the termination procedure, and the RTB can make a direction that a landlord pay an amount by way of damages for the deprivation of the tenancy and/or may make a direction that the tenant be permitted to resume occupation of the premises.

On 23 November 2017, the RTB published a comprehensive set of guidelines on what constitutes substantial refurbishment or renovation for the purposes of a section 34 ground for tenancy termination. The guidelines are available on the RTB website at the following link: https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/Comms%20and%20Research/RTB_Guidelines_for_good_practice_on_the_substantial_change_exemption_in_Rent_Pressure_Zones.pdf.

I have asked my Department to keep under review whether there is merit in placing these guidelines on a statutory footing.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

60. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to make legislative changes to ensure that persons in receipt of the housing assistance payment, HAP, are kept on the regular social housing list rather than on a transfer list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19867/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is considered to be a social housing support and consequently households are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list. However, acknowledging that some households on the waiting list, who avail of HAP, have expectations that they would receive a more traditional form of social housing support, Ministerial directions have issued to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP recipients can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list.

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Furthermore, local authorities were also directed that HAP recipients, who apply to go on the transfer list, should get full credit for the time they spent on the waiting list and be placed on the transfer list with no less favourable terms than if they had remained on the waiting list.

The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their own scheme of letting priorities. The setting of such schemes is a reserved function of the local authority and as such is a matter for the elected members.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 43.

Land Availability

62. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the views expressed in his proposal to the public consultation conducted by the Department of Finance on the issue of unused zoned and serviced land which determined that no new tax intended to encourage the development of residentially zoned and serviced land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19863/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department did not make a formal submission in the context of the public consultation held by the Department of Finance referred to by the Deputy.

However, as the Deputy will be aware, the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant under-utilised sites in urban areas for residential or regeneration purposes. Under the Act, planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites, exceeding 0.05 hectares in area, which, in the planning authority's opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development.

As announced in Budget 2018, it is proposed to increase the rate of levy from 3% to 7% of the market valuation of relevant sites with effect from January 2020 in respect of sites included on the local vacant site registers in 2019. Legislative provision for this increase along with amendments to other relevant provisions will be tabled by way of Seanad Report Stage amendments to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which has recently completed Seanad Committee Stage.

In addition, with a view to addressing the issue of land hoarding, a number of other amendments have been tabled to the Bill, during its passage in the Oireachtas. In this regard, the principal amendment is to provisions relating to the extension of duration of planning permission. The amendment proposed would permit the extension of the duration of a planning permission only where substantial works are carried out during the initial duration of the planning permission and allow for a maximum of two extensions of the duration of a permission, the combined duration of which would not exceed 5 years. This proposed amendment is part of a package of measures which are aimed at combatting land hoarding.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 31.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

64. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress being made to reduce the social housing waiting lists; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [19608/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 50,000 social housing homes will be delivered through build, acquisition and leasing programmes. In addition to this, 87,000 additional households will be supported through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). When combined, over 137,000 long term and flexible options will be made available to those on the housing waiting lists under Rebuilding Ireland.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support, in each local authority area, are set out in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments. The most recent summary, which was carried out in 2017, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists, as at 28 June 2017. The 2017 summary shows that 85,799 households were assessed as being qualified for and in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 5,801 households or 6.3% compared to the 2016 summary.

I recently wrote to all local authorities setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021. Details of these are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

The Government, working with the local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and other delivery agents, is already exceeding the delivery targets set for the first two years of Rebuilding Ireland. Of the combined target of 137,000 referred to above, just under 45,000 households have had their housing need met by the end of year 2 of the Rebuilding Ireland Plan – 33% of those targeted under the 6 year Plan as a whole.

Detailed data in relation to social housing delivery by each local authority for 2017, including units built directly by local authorities is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1b1-la-bld-by-area_10.xlsx .

My Department will continue to work with local authorities to maximise delivery and also harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units in 2018, including through turnkey schemes.

Rent Pressure Zones

65. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review and expand the rent pressure zone system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19847/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

(i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must

be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,054 per month in Q4 2017).

My Department has conducted a review of the Rent Predictability Measure on the basis of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) rent data and a public consultation on the operation of the Rent Pressure Zones. In September 2017, arising from the review findings, I announced a number of measures to further strengthen the effectiveness of the rent setting and rent review laws, including the implementation of a change plan to develop and strengthen the role of the RTB, particularly with regard to enforcement.

These measures include the intention to make it an offence to increase rents in contravention of the legislation and to provide the RTB with the necessary powers and resources to protect tenants from illegal rent increases. These changes will strengthen the impact of the Rent Predictability Measure and should contribute to a further slowing in the growth in rents, in tandem with increasing supply.

The Government has given priority to the drafting and early publication of a Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill to address these and other urgent reforms in the residential rental sector.

The Residential Tenancies Board's latest quarterly Rent Index Report for Q4 2017, which was published in March, shows reductions in the rate of rental inflation across both national and Dublin rents. The slowdown in the quarterly growth rate in Dublin rents to 1.1% in Q4 2017 is particularly noteworthy, bringing the annualised growth rate over 2017 to 5.2%, a drop from 8% in the year to Q3 2017. Significantly, this 5.2% increase for Dublin is the lowest annual growth rate since 2013. This latest quarterly index provides evidence that the introduction of the RPZs, in December 2016, is having a positive effect on rent inflation, particularly in Dublin.

The RTB Rent Index Report also includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating Rent Pressure Zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country. This allows everyone to see exactly where their area stands in relation to average rent levels and increases and possible designation.

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones. However, at present, I have no plans to expand these measures further.

Local Authority Staff

66. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether local authorities are suitably resourced with the relevant personnel, for example, architects, planners, engineers and so on, to deliver sufficient social housing as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19696/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, it is the Chief Executive of each local authority who is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the authority.

My Department works closely with all local authorities and staffing sanction requests are dealt with on a case-by-case basis with priority given to housing-related posts, as well as those relating to health and safety and economic development. In that context, since 1 January 2015,

my Department has received 820 housing-related staff sanction requests from local authorities, 793 of which have been approved, with 27 pending. Additional supports are also being made available to local authorities to meet staffing costs associated with the delivery of their social housing build programmes.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

67. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when additional projects in County Kildare can be considered for local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19734/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The first call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) was issued to all local authorities in August 2016 and I have fully approved 30 projects for funding in the order of €195 million with an associated expected activation of delivery of 20,000 housing units by 2021.

Kildare County Council submitted seven projects for consideration under LIHAF. Funding was approved for three of these proposals, at Maynooth, Naas and Sallins, with funding totaling €21.43 million. Four other projects were also submitted but it was not possible to approve those projects at that time.

As part of Budget 2018, I announced that an additional €50 million Exchequer funding will be available for a second LIHAF call. As was the case in the original LIHAF call, this will be subject to matching funding by local authorities. My Department will provide 75% Exchequer funding, with the local authorities themselves providing 25% matching funding. This will bring overall LIHAF funding under both calls to over €260 million.

A further call for proposals under phase 2 of LIHAF will be issued shortly to local authorities and it will be open to all local authorities to submit new projects or re-submit previous projects for consideration.

Questions Nos. 68 to 70, inclusive, answered with Question No. 43.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 55.

Mortgage Insurance

72. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the cost of mortgage protection insurance associated with the Rebuilding Ireland home loans and the way in which this impacts on the size of loan a person can borrow; the way in which the cost is determined; the way in which the provider was selected; the way in which he plans to reduce the cost associated with the insurance; and his further plans to address the lack of clear information on the Rebuilding Ireland home loan website regarding the implications for the size of loan a person may be eligible for when the cost of mortgage protection insurance is included. [19842/18]

465. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the high cost of the compulsory mortgage protection insurance for Rebuilding Ireland home loan applicants; the reason applicants are debarred from sourcing their own more competitively priced mortgage protection insurance; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [19643/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 465 together.

It is a statutory requirement that mortgage protection insurance (MPI) is taken out in respect of all local authority housing loans.

The Local Authority Mortgage Protection Insurance scheme is a group scheme, overseen by the Mortgage Protection Insurance Committee. This is a sub-committee of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) with representatives from the CCMA, local authorities, the Housing Finance Agency, as well as my Department.

The scheme has applied to all house purchase loans approved by local authorities after 1 July 1986. One of the conditions of the scheme, which is a group policy, is that it is obligatory for all borrowers who meet the eligibility criteria to join the scheme. Altering this condition would have a negative impact on the scheme and increase the cost for all existing borrowers.

The insurance scheme is subject to periodic review and competitive tendering in accordance with the terms of EU Directives relating to the award of public service contracts. This is to ensure that the most appropriate cover at the best value for money is secured for local authority borrowers over the entire life of their mortgages.

The most recent public procurement competition for the provision and administration of this MPI scheme was conducted by the Office of Government Procurement. The new contract resulting from this open tender competition came into effect from 1 January 2017 for a period of 3 years.

The local authority MPI is a group scheme and is designed to provide an appropriate level of insurance cover to those who wish to avail of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. It offers a number of additional features over and above the standard MPI products available on the market. Standard MPI products are individually priced, based on a member's age, amongst other factors, whereas the local authority MPI scheme is a group arrangement, offering a single group rate per €1,000 sum assured to all participants in the scheme.

The scheme also provides other benefits over standard MPI products. These include the payment of mortgage repayments if there is a valid claim as a result of disability; an additional payment of €3,000 in the event of a member's death, separate to life cover; and members are also covered for death up to age 75 rather than 65 as is the case under standard MPI cover.

Regarding the information available to prospective applicants on the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website, I am aware of issues concerning the inclusion of the cost of MPI in the on-line calculator. I have recently met with the Chief Executives of the two main agencies involved in its implementation, the Housing Agency and the Housing Finance Agency, and I have directed that they address a number of issues to improve the operation of the scheme. One of these involves amending the on-line calculator in order to take the cost of mortgage protection insurance into account. This will therefore give potential applicants a clearer indication of the amount that they could be eligible to borrow under the scheme.

Rental Sector Strategy

73. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the working group report on short-term lettings will be published; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [19851/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department established a Working Group, involving representatives of all major public stakeholders with a policy interest in short-term lettings, to develop guidance in relation to planning applications, changes of use relating to short-term lettings and to examine the need for new regulatory arrangements.

The proposals under consideration by the Working Group, which has met on six occasions to date, have been aimed at facilitating short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences, known as home-sharing, while protecting existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand, safeguarding neighbourhood amenity and consumer protection, and generating revenue to address any negative externalities of short-term letting.

The Working Group completed guidance for local authorities on planning applications relating to short-term lettings and my Department issued a circular on the matter last October.

The Group has since been focused on developing proposals for an appropriate comprehensive regulatory approach for short-term tourism-related lettings as well as identifying amendments to relevant legislation that may be necessary to give effect to such a regulatory regime.

The report of the Working Group has now been submitted to my Department and I will complete my consideration of it, including the need for a targeted public consultation, without delay.

Housing Assistance Payment

74. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the inadequacies regarding the new housing assistance payment scheme will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19607/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) provides fast, flexible housing support to households in an area of their choice. Individuals with a housing need, who in the past were reluctant to avail of full time work as they would lose their Rent Supplement support, can now move to HAP and avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent.

HAP has been rolled out on a statutory phased basis since September 2014 and became a national scheme on 1st March 2017 when the nationwide rollout was completed. The phased nature of the HAP rollout has allowed for significant learning with new HAP authorities benefiting from the experience of those authorities where the scheme has been previously operational.

At the end of 2017, over 31,200 tenancies were being supported by the HAP scheme, including 17,916 additional households in 2017. There are now 20,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of monthly HAP payments.

As HAP is a social housing support and consequently households are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list, Ministerial directions have issued to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP recipients can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list.

In addition, guidelines on Inter-authority movement were introduced in 2017, to allow for local authorities to facilitate movement of HAP households in cases where a tenant, currently

on a local authority waiting list, wishes to access rented accommodation with HAP support in another local authority area, subject to conditions.

In relation to specific HAP supports available to homeless households, the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service operating in the Dublin local authorities, and in Cork City Council, is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than 2,000 households currently being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme. A similar service began operating in Cork City in 2017. In order to further assist homeless households in exiting emergency accommodation the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service, is now available to each of the 31 local authorities, with the options to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP Scheme.

I continue to keep the operation of HAP under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting current housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme set out in Rebuilding Ireland.

Departmental Reports

75. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the report regarding the establishment of a redress scheme for those homeowners whose homes were built using defective blocks; when such a scheme might be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19792/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

The panel had the following terms of reference:

(i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

On 13 June 2017, the report of the *Expert Panel* was published and included eight recommendations which my Department are actively progressing with the relevant stakeholders.

My Department is prioritising the implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) Technical Committee, established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, held its inaugural meeting on 11 September 2017 and has held several further meet-

ings since. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. My Department understands from the NSAI that the Technical Committee is in the process of finalising the standardised protocol, which will be available for public consultation shortly. The public consultation will run for a period of six weeks.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowners/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland have provided assurance that they will collaborate with the Department, the NSAI and others on measures to establish such a register once the standardised protocol is in place.

Last year I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties. On 18 December 2017, I again visited Donegal and met with key stakeholders to provide an update on the progress to date. I made a similar visit to Mayo on 26 January 2018.

In addition, and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

Rent Pressure Zones

76. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his strategy to address the problem of excessive rent increases in areas outside rent pressure zones. [19844/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. For the purpose of the Act, 'area' is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001. There is no provision for any other type of area to be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone.

For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

(i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (i.e. €1,054 per month in Q4 2017).

On 21 March 2018, the RTB published its Rent Index Report in relation to Quarter 4 2017, which includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating Rent Pressure Zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country. This allows everyone to see exactly where their area stands in relation to average rent levels and increases and possible designation.

Rent reviews outside of Rent Pressure Zones are restricted so that a landlord can only review the rent once in any two-year period. However, similar to within Rent Pressure Zones, where there is a substantial change in the nature of the accommodation provided, for example through a major refurbishment of the property, a landlord may review the rent before the two-year period has ended and therefore many of the principles in determining what is classified as substantial change are the same. The existing requirement that the rent set is not above the market rents for similar properties still applies in designated Rent Pressure Zones and in non-designated areas.

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

Approved Housing Bodies

77. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of work to reverse the EUROSTAT decision to redesignate approved housing bodies as part of the Government sector. [19784/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As the Deputy will be aware, the Minister for Finance has recently published the Draft Stability Programme Update for 2018. This included an analysis of the financial impact of the Eurostat decision to reclassify the majority of Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) as part of the local government sector. This was an important first step in the Government's assessment as to the impact of the Eurostat decision.

Following the completion of this analysis, which has defined the scope of the financial implications of this decision for the Exchequer, my Department will be engaging closely with the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure that AHBs can continue to fulfil their full potential in the delivery of the targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. In that context, arrangements are being made for further discussions on the next stage of this process, which will take place in the coming weeks.

I am also aware that the AHB sector have engaged their own research into this important issue and my Department is evaluating the work undertaken in this regard.

The Government continues to see a central role for the voluntary housing sector in contributing to delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland, and is committed to using all mechanisms and schemes, including through the AHB sector, to ensure that we maintain the momentum towards meeting the ambitious 50,000 social housing target under the Action Plan.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 42.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

79. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if projects which were part of local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, 1 but which have not progressed will have to compete with other projects for funding as part of LIHAF 2; if they will be prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19846/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department issued the first call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation

Fund (LIHAF) to all local authorities in August 2016 and I have fully approved funding for 30 infrastructure projects at a cost of approximately €195 million.

As part of Budget 2018, I announced that an additional €50 million Exchequer funding will be available for a second LIHAF call. As was the case in the original LIHAF call, this will be subject to matching funding by local authorities. My Department will provide 75% Exchequer funding, with the Local Authorities themselves providing 25% matching funding. This will bring overall LIHAF funding under both calls to over €260 million.

My Department will shortly issue a call for proposals for the second round of funding under LIHAF. It will be open to all local authorities to submit new projects or resubmit previous projects that did not receive funding under LIHAF1 for consideration.

Projects will be evaluated on criteria, based on clear policy objectives as set out in the LIHAF2 call for proposals, and no particular priority will be given to previously submitted projects that did not receive funding under the first call. If such previously submitted projects have made progress in the interim, local authorities can highlight this within their updated proposal and it may factor into the assessment process in terms of project readiness.

Land Acquisition

80. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the role his Department will play with regard to the new Government agency that will buy private land adjoining existing prime sites held by State and semi-State organisations in order to assemble land holdings that will then be developed for housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19861/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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. Against that background, it is proposed to establish a National Regeneration and Development Agency to assist in ensuring a more effective approach to strategic land management, particularly in terms of publicly owned land.

To maximise its effectiveness, the Agency will focus on activating the development potential of strategic pieces of underutilised public lands in key urban areas to stimulate regeneration and wider investment. This will involve working primarily with the relevant local authorities and wider public bodies and the private sector, with the scope to assemble and rationalise land holdings, whether they are publicly or privately owned, in order to enable the re-purposing of lands that may not be currently used optimally, with regard to wider and long-term public policy and planning objectives.

Detailed arrangements in relation to the functions, powers and mechanisms for the establishment of the Agency are currently being developed by my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with a view to their finalisation and implementation at the earliest available opportunity.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

81. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, project at Ballin-

collig, County Cork has not advanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19845/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department will shortly issue the first call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) to all local authorities in August 2016. 34 projects received preliminary approval in March 2017. The project referred to was one of four projects that did not subsequently proceed from preliminary approval to final approval.

Projects were given a specific period of time in which to secure requisite local agreements with developers and landowners in respect of housing delivery. Some additional time was also given to the Ballincollig project at the request of the local authority but, unfortunately, sufficient progress on a particular local issue could not be made prior to the expiry of the final deadline for signing of a grant agreement under the first LIHAF call. This was despite the best efforts of Cork County Council who put a great deal of time into the project.

As part of Budget 2018, I announced that an additional €50 million Exchequer funding will be available for a second LIHAF call. This will again be subject to matching funding by local authorities bringing total funding for the second call to €66.5 million.

My Department will shortly issue a call for proposals for this second round of funding under LIHAF and it will be open to all local authorities to submit new projects or resubmit previous projects for consideration, including the Ballincollig project, if the local authority chooses to do so.

Local Government Fund

82. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to address the anticipated shortfall of income of €260 million to the Local Government Fund over the next six years due to a reduction in motor taxation receipts by this amount as outlined in the special report compiled by the Comptroller and Auditor General; and the impact of this reduction in income to the provision of local authority services. [19834/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): From the 1st of January 2018 motor tax receipts accrue directly to the Exchequer rather than to the Local Government Fund (LGF). Accordingly, there will be no shortfall in income to the Local Government Fund as a result of any decline in motor tax receipts.

As set out in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018, income to the LGF will amount to an estimated €595m, comprising a payment from the Exchequer of €125m and Local Property Tax receipts of €470m.

Expenditure from the LGF in 2018 will be an estimated €621m, including Local Property Tax allocations to local authorities of €504m.

Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure

83. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to spend the €25 million fund for affordable housing announced in budget 2018. [19783/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The development of residential lands owned by local authorities and the Housing Agency for social housing and, where appropriate, for mixed-tenure developments is a major priority under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. Details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership have been published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to accommodate some 42,500 homes nationally. All of the mapped sites can be viewed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

In order to aid local authorities further in delivering affordable housing from their sites, I am providing funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned lands in our major urban areas specifically for affordable homes to buy or rent. I intend to issue the call for proposals very shortly. The funding will support local authorities to provide infrastructure on sites which they own, in urban areas facing the greatest affordability challenge in order to facilitate affordable housing provision. The funding will also include a contribution from local authorities in a 75/25 split, bringing the total fund to some €33 million, €22 million of which is earmarked for spending in 2018, with the remainder for use in 2019.

In addition, in order to relieve critical infrastructure blockages and enable housing developments to be built on key local authority and private sites at scale, total funding of over €260 million is being allocated under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). To date, I have given final approval for 30 projects under LIHAF1, at a cost of some €195 million, which will activate supply of almost 20,000 homes. Grant agreements in respect of those projects have been signed. A second call for proposals for projects to be funded under LIHAF2, will be issued shortly.

Housing Data

84. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 130 of 19 January 2017, the status of the plan to build 73 new units in Ballyburke, Galway city; the number of units that have been completed; the number of units due to be completed in 2018; when the development projected will be fully completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19830/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Social Housing Public Private Partnership (PPP) Programme involves an investment with a capital value of €300 million, with the aim of delivering 1,500 social housing units in total, via three bundles.

The Ballyburke site is part of the second bundle, comprising eight PPP sites in total, which will provide over 450 units. Three of the sites are located in the Cork County Council area, with one each in the Galway City Council, Waterford City & County Council, and Clare, Kildare and Roscommon County Council areas.

There are currently 74 housing units planned for the Ballyburke site. These are made up of 33 two-beds units, 39 three-bed units and 2 four-bed units. Detailed design work has been completed for these units and a Part 8 planning decision on the site is expected to be made at a meeting of Galway City Council next month.

In line with the scheduled programme for this bundle of PPP sites, it is expected that short-listing of prospective tenderers will be undertaken in July, which will allow the project to move to the next phase. I expect that construction of the housing units on this site will commence in

2019, with completion in 2020.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

85. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason only €1.6 million in funding has been drawn down to date through the local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, which was allocated a total of €266 million (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19673/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department issued the first call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) to all local authorities in August 2016. Preliminary approval was given to 34 projects in March 2017 and I have since fully approved funding for 30 of the 34 projects, including roads, bridges and parks, at a cost of approximately €195 million, with an associated housing delivery of 20,000 housing units by 2021.

As part of Budget 2018, I announced that an additional €50 million Exchequer funding will be available for a second LIHAF call. As was the case in the original LIHAF call, this will be subject to matching funding by local authorities. My Department will provide 75% Exchequer funding, with the Local Authorities themselves providing 25% matching funding. This will bring funding for the second call to €66.5 million and overall LIHAF funding under both calls to over €260 million. The call for proposals under LIHAF2 will be issued to local authorities shortly.

Projects approved for funding under LIHAF will typically have design, planning, tendering and construction phases for the public infrastructure concerned. All projects that received preliminary approval in March 2017 were allowed to proceed to design phase immediately after that and most are going through the planning and tendering phases at the moment.

Local authorities can draw down the funding allocated to their projects at any stage, once the project cost has been incurred. My Department invited the 14 local authorities to submit their first tranche of certified expenditure at the end of 2017 and the total submitted by local authorities for draw down was €1.6 million. My Department is currently processing draw-down requests for Q1 2018.

While there was an underspend by local authorities in 2017, funding for LIHAF is ring-fenced within the overall housing budget and through proactive management of the broader housing programme, any LIHAF underspend was diverted to other housing activities, ensuring that the funding available in 2017 was fully applied to housing priorities.

The low level of the draw down to date by local authorities reflects the stages which these infrastructure projects are currently at. The expenditure incurred during the design, planning and tendering stages is significantly lower than that at the construction stage so a major increase in draw-down will arise as projects progress through construction.

While I am anxious for the infrastructure and the housing to be delivered as fast as possible, I recognise that local authorities must observe proper design, planning and tendering procedures. My Department will continue to monitor progress on these sites and ensure that every effort is made to secure the timely delivery of the infrastructure involved.

Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 43.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

87. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which he plans to improve the supply of newly built local authority social and affordable housing; the reason for the low output from this sector in recent years; the targets he is now working to for this sector; and the way in which such homes will be delivered. [19840/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland, together with initiatives announced on foot of the targeted review of progress which was undertaken last year, as well as additional measures announced under Budget 2018, provides a robust framework for addressing the housing and homelessness challenges we face.

One of the key outcomes of the second Housing Summit with local authority Chief Executives held earlier this year was a commitment to drive greater transparency and accountability at individual local authority level on the delivery of the targets under Rebuilding Ireland. On foot of a detailed process of engagement since then between my Department and individual local authorities, I have now advised local authorities of the social housing targets for 2018 and also for the multi-annual period to 2021.

Under the targets announced, a minimum of 40,700 homes will be delivered during the 4 year period to end-2021, including over 7,800 this year alone. Taking account of the progress already made in 2016 and 2017, this will ensure that the 50,000 social housing home target under Rebuilding Ireland will be met. In addition, the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Schemes will continue to play an important part in meeting social housing needs, with approximately 18,000 households targeted for support under these schemes in 2018.

My Department's focus, and that of all delivery agents, will remain on implementation and delivery to ensure that the range of objectives and targets set are achieved. A wide range of delivery mechanisms and a funding commitment of €6 billion over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland have been put in place to support the achievement of these targets.

While it is recognised that the pace of delivery, particularly under build activity, may vary from local authority to local authority, the range of delivery options available provide the necessary resources for local authorities and I expect all stakeholders to be fully mobilised towards meeting the target for 2018, and subsequent years.

Notwithstanding the genuine challenges that arise with construction projects of all types, we need to ensure that progress is made to ensure delivery as quickly as possible and we are also keen to harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units in 2018, including through turnkey schemes.

In direct response to the housing challenge and in order to support housing authorities deliver on their responsibilities and obligations, a number of dedicated structures have been put in place to support Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and Local Authorities to maximise their delivery potential and to harness the best that is available in their functional areas, including for example:

- A dedicated Housing Delivery Office established within my Department to support local authorities, AHBs and all stakeholders involved in the delivery of key elements of the ambitious private and social housing targets in Rebuilding Ireland; and

- The AHB Services Unit, established in the Housing Agency, to support and facilitate AHBs by co-ordinating on a number of key areas.

In addition, my Department has worked with local authorities to review the processes and procedures for the approval of social housing construction projects and has agreed an overall target programme of 59 weeks for progressing typical social housing construction projects from initial project conception through design, planning and procurement up to contractors going on site.

More detailed guidelines have been prepared in relation to submissions to be made to my Department. The single-stage approval process for projects under €2 million has been revised and my Department is working with local authorities to increase take-up. Rapid build approaches are also increasingly being used, which can save time in relation to design, procurement and construction of new social housing.

My Department also has continuous contact with local authorities around all forms of housing delivery, including regular technical meetings to review progress in respect of social housing projects and to clear any blockages, as swiftly as possible.

The delivery of more affordable homes, to buy or rent, is a major priority for Government, focusing in particular on the cities of Dublin, Galway and Cork, where people are facing the greatest affordability challenge. New measures announced in January 2018 are specifically targeted at delivering more affordable homes and have the potential to deliver more than 3,000 new affordable homes to buy or rent initially, with a target delivery of at least 10,000 new affordable homes in the medium to longer term. The emphasis initially will be on delivering affordable homes from the public land bank in urban areas where affordability issues are greatest. Recognising that there are enabling infrastructure requirements on some sites, I am also providing Exchequer funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, as a key contribution towards the delivery of more affordable housing from local authority land.

In terms of affordable purchase, the new Scheme will be based on the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which will be commenced shortly, and enabling regulations which are in preparation. At that point, the elected members of each local authority will be responsible for determining the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households, in line with the national scheme's framework. In the meantime, Dublin City Council has a number of major ready-to-go sites being advanced through procurement. The elected members of the City Council have determined that 20% of the homes on sites at Infirmaroy Road and Oscar Traynor Road will be made available to eligible households for affordable purchase. Proposals are also advancing for the redevelopment of the St. Michael's Estate site in Inchicore.

In addition, against the background of the affordability pressures which currently exist in the rental market, the Government is determined to make cost rental a major part of the Irish housing system, similar to the role it plays in many other European countries. Under this approach, rents are set at levels to recover the construction costs and to facilitate the management and administration of developments, but with only a minimal profit margin included. A pilot project is currently being progressed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, at Enniskerry Road in Dundrum, in conjunction with the Housing Agency and Approved Housing Bodies, using land owned by the Agency.

Learning from the initial experiences in the pilot scheme, my Department is working with the European Investment Bank and other key stakeholders with a view to developing the first major cost rental project in Dublin city. Initial feasibility analysis is underway with a view to identifying a major project for immediate progression, with a broader programme of cost rental projects across Dublin and other cities to follow.

While the development of any residential land in housing authority ownership is in the first instance a matter for the local authority concerned, including its elected members, I want to see

local authorities realise new social and affordable homes from their lands without delay, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

Homeless Persons Data

88. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families with children being accommodated in hotels each month since July 2017 to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19606/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Monthly homelessness data reports are produced by housing authorities using the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. My Department collates this information into monthly national homeless reports, which are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These monthly reports include a breakdown of the numbers in families and associated dependents in different categories of emergency accommodation. Commercial hotels are included within the private emergency accommodation category. Details on the number of families and children in hotels specifically is not available in my Department, but certain data in relation to the use of hotels for emergency accommodation in Dublin are available on the Dublin Region Homeless Executive website, *www.homelessdublin.ie/info*.

Home Loan Scheme

89. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department is collating a central database of Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme applications from each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19848/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated. My Department therefore does not directly collect information on the number of enquiries to local authorities regarding the loan or the number of loan applications received by local authorities.

As is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q3 2017 is available on the Department's website at the following link: *<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>*, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses completed applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be made to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures of the numbers of applications that it has assessed. To date, it has received a total of 660 valid applications for assessment from local authorities. Of these,

479 have been assessed and 46% of the applications which have been assessed by the Agency have been recommended for approval. It is then a matter for the relevant local authority credit committee to ultimately determine whether a loan application is approved, having regard to the Agency's recommendation and other relevant factors.

Vacant Sites Levy

90. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to update legislation to address anomalies in the vacant site levy and to deal with land hoarding. [19841/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas, for residential or regeneration purposes. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017. Planning authorities will be issuing notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018, indicating that the levy will apply to those sites on 1 January 2019.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites, exceeding 0.05 hectares in area, which, in the planning authority's opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development.

As announced in the Budget 2018, it is proposed to increase the rate of levy from 3% to 7% of the market valuation of relevant sites with effect from January 2020 in respect of sites included on the local vacant site registers in 2019. Legislative provision for this increase along with amendments to other relevant provisions will be tabled by way of Seanad Report Stage amendments to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which has recently completed Seanad Committee Stage.

To ensure consistent application of the levy provisions across all city and county areas and to facilitate the sharing of best practice, my Department has provided guidance and advice and also organised a workshop last week which was attended by every local authority.

Departmental Staff Training

91. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach the amount spent on facilitating departmental members' attendance at social media training conferences or other external events. [19616/18]

The Taoiseach: There has been no expenditure by my Department in respect of attendance at social media training conferences or events. My Department did, however, recently run a training session on Mobile Journalism which was attended by officials from other Government Departments.

Company	Details	Amount
Glen Mulcahy T/A Titanium Media	Mobile Journalism Training (January 2018)	€2,000.00

Departmental Staff

92. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if a civil servant in his Department made contact with members of An Garda Síochána in connection with the events of 23 and 24 June 2017 when a civil servant in his Department was arrested outside Cabra Garda station; and if so, the details of the contact between 23 June 2017 and to date in 2018. [19618/18]

The Taoiseach: I can confirm that no civil servant acting on behalf of my Department made contact with An Garda Síochána in relation to the events outlined by the Deputy.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

93. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he held meetings while attending the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium; and the issues that were discussed. [19619/18]

94. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his speech in Leuven. [19621/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

I delivered an address on the Future of Europe at the Catholic University of Leuven as part of its Wilfried Martens series of lectures. This is an annual event, with previous speakers including Commission President Juncker and former German Finance Minister Schauble. The event was live-streamed and the text of my speech is available online.

My speech covered the many achievements of the European Union, the benefits for Ireland of EU membership, and my thoughts about the future direction of the Union, including the importance of completing the Single Market and Digital Single Market, and working together to deliver concrete benefits for our citizens. I also, of course, spoke about developments in the negotiations on Brexit.

In my address, I emphasised the need for an ambitious and positive approach to our discussions about the future of Europe, and the importance of maintaining our core EU values and principles - respect for human dignity, personal and economic freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights.

I noted that many of the challenges we face - climate change, cyber-security, illegal migration, international trade and the regulation of major corporations - cannot be resolved by 28 states coming up with twenty-eight different solutions, and that we need to work together to respond effectively.

I also emphasised the importance of our relations with the rest of the world, including Africa and the Western Balkans, and noted my intention to participate in the Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May.

I stressed the importance of communicating and engaging with our citizens on key issues relating to the future of Europe. From Ireland's perspective, I outlined our Citizens' Dialogue which I launched last November, and explained that the intention of this has been to facilitate an open and wide-ranging debate with our citizens, which will help to inform our approach.

On Brexit, I noted the particular issues arising for Ireland and the need to preserve the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and the gains of the Peace Process. I noted the commitment to translate into the legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement the principles and commitments

agreed between the EU and the UK last December, including in relation to the border, and stressed the need to make real and solid progress on this before the June European Council.

After the speech, I attended a reception in the University where I had the opportunity to meet a range of academics and students, including Irish students studying there.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

95. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when he last spoke to Prime Minister May; if the framework for the future relationship was discussed; and if she spoke regarding the backstop outlined in the December 2017 agreement and the way in which she referenced same in her speech in the Mansion House, London recently. [19622/18]

The Taoiseach: I had a short meeting with Prime Minister May in the margins of the European Council on 23 March during which we discussed the latest developments in relation to Brexit, Northern Ireland and Russia.

On Brexit, I welcomed her government's commitment to ensuring the backstop forms part of the Withdrawal Agreement, and looked forward to progress on this and on the other options before the European Council in June. I also conveyed to her my outrage at the attack in Salisbury.

This was my fifth bilateral meeting with her in recent months. I had previously met her in Belfast on 12 February where we assessed the state of play in the negotiations to restore the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly and encouraged the parties to reach an agreement so that functioning institutions can commence work again in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Between these two bilateral meetings, I spoke by phone with PM May on Monday 19 February to review the latest developments in Northern Ireland and again on Monday 26 February when we discussed Brexit and the draft Withdrawal Agreement in particular, in addition to matters relating to Northern Ireland.

There is also regular ongoing contact between my Department and the British Government at official level about Brexit and the situation in Northern Ireland.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

96. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he met the Commissioner, Mr. Phil Hogan, when he was in Dublin addressing Seanad Éireann; and if so, the issues that were discussed. [19623/18]

The Taoiseach: I had a private meeting with the Commissioner on the evening Wednesday, 25 April. We had an exchange of views on a range of issues, including Brexit, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

Defence Forces

97. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to mark the 40th anniversary of Irish troops being deployed to Lebanon; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [19658/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): This year marks significant anniversaries in relation to Ireland's UN peacekeeping role. It will be the 60th anniversary of Ireland's first participation in a UN peacekeeping mission and it is the 40th anniversary of the first deployment of Defence Force personnel to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL mission.

Ireland has made a huge commitment to supporting peace and security in the Middle East region and has participated in the UNIFIL mission since its establishment in 1978. There are currently some 370 personnel deployed to the mission.

My recent visit to Lebanon in March coincided with the official UN commemorations in Naqoura to mark the 40th anniversary of the UNIFIL mission's establishment. It was an occasion to pay tribute to the tens of thousands of UN peacekeepers who have served together with local communities for peace in South Lebanon. It was a great honour to be present while a veteran Irish Peacekeeper delivered a poignant and emotional tribute to fallen peacekeepers at the ceremony. The respect and high regard that is held internationally for the professionalism displayed by our Irish Peacekeepers was clearly evident.

Appropriate commemorative events are being planned to mark this year's important milestones in the history of Ireland's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations by the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána. A State ceremony will take place in Dublin Castle on Sunday 24th June 2018. Arrangements are currently being finalised and details will shortly be announced. It is intended that the ceremony will be an occasion to show our pride in those who have served in our name with the U.N. while also calling to mind those who surrendered their lives so that others might know the gift of peace.

Defence Forces Fatalities

98. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the recommendations from the January 2006 review in the aftermath of the death of a person (details supplied); the recommendations that were not implemented; and the reason therefor. [19774/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In February 2006, the then Minister for Defence received a report following an independent review conducted by Mr. Sean Hurley on the interactions between the Department of Defence/Defence Forces and the parents and family of Private Kevin Barrett in the aftermath of the tragic death of Private Barrett on 18th February 1999 while serving with UNIFIL in South Lebanon.

Mr Hurley looked in detail at how the Department and the Defence Forces interacted with the Barrett family after Kevin's death and made a number of recommendations under the following headings:

- The Families' Request for information
- The Repatriation of Private Barrett's Remains
- The Pre and Post Liaison Arrangements

The Coroner's Inquest

Important lessons were learnt and following on from publication of the report, the Defence Forces standard operating procedures have been reviewed and a number of actions taken in

response to recommendations contained in the report.

Practices and procedures in relation to the preservation of evidence collected in the course of investigations have been reviewed and changes to policies and procedures introduced. Specialised evidence storage lockers have also been issued to units both at home and overseas. Specific instruction is provided by the Military Police to Officers in charge of overseas military posts, on the procedures to be undertaken to preserve the scene of accidents, incidents and crimes pending the arrival of Military Police.

Bereavement procedures have been reviewed. The Defence Forces Bereavement Policy and Bereavement Handbook and a Unit Commanders Guideline on Bereavement and serious injury have been issued and are updated regularly.

The roles and responsibilities of Medical Officers at autopsies conducted outside the jurisdiction have been reviewed. While instructions for Medical Officers with regard to autopsy have been outlined, the attendance of Medical Officers at autopsies and their reporting capacity is dependent on the rules in place in the country in which Defence Forces personnel are deployed.

Specific procedures are in place for the repatriation of a member of the Defence Forces who is deceased while overseas.

Following publication of the report and at the request of the then Minister for Defence, arrangements were made for the Garda Síochána to conduct a thorough and detailed investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Private Kevin Barrett. The Gardaí subsequently briefed the family on the findings arising from their investigation into Private Barrett's death. The Department of Defence remained in contact with the family throughout the investigation.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

99. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if media reports that in 2016 it cost the taxpayer €15 million to replace Defence Forces personnel that left were accurate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19817/18]

100. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Permanent Defence Force in whole-time equivalent terms, that left the service in each of the years 2013 to 2017, for reasons other than retirement; the branch of the service of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19818/18]

101. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated savings that would be made in terms of training and recruitment if the numbers leaving the Permanent Defence Force in 2018 for reasons other than retirement were halved relative to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19819/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 to 101, inclusive, together.

Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, there is understandably a relatively high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. This is not new and the Permanent Defence Force has always had a level of turnover that far exceeds other areas of the public service. This is a necessary feature of military organisations and allows for continuous renewal, promotions etc.

Questions - Written Answers

The table below sets out the numbers leaving for each of the years from 2002 to 2017.

-	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
LT GEN	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
MAJ GEN	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
BRIG GEN	3	2	0	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	3
COL	2	6	5	5	5	9	1	14	5	7	8	3	8	2	9	8
LT COL	13	7	6	10	6	12	13	18	17	10	16	12	16	12	12	16
COMDT	20	19	12	19	27	28	26	33	21	38	31	20	28	22	35	23
CAPT	13	6	9	10	10	9	7	10	11	13	11	20	19	30	21	20
LT	6	1	3	7	2	3	1	2	0	4	2	2	8	5	2	6
Officers	58	41	37	53	52	63	49	82	56	74	70	59	81	75	80	76
SGT MAJOR	4	4	6	11	6	6	4	9	4	3	7	0	5	1	3	8
BQMS	9	2	4	2	7	7	1	12	7	8	2	1	5	3	1	9
CS/FS/BS	18	16	22	9	16	28	16	22	32	26	36	11	19	20	25	21
CQMS/FQMS	12	15	13	14	22	19	20	24	26	26	38	14	13	11	15	19
SGT	86	67	76	54	75	60	73	93	70	84	117	52	44	73	97	71
CPL	90	80	62	60	68	85	70	59	82	79	110	55	39	70	47	57
PTE 3 *	297	217	162	174	215	193	131	164	208	271	258	147	141	217	218	237
Other Ranks	516	401	345	324	409	398	315	383	429	497	568	280	266	395	406	422
CADET	8	6	9	5	8	7	2	2	3	5	4	2	4	8	7	12
PTE 2 *	35	20	12	33	24	28	28	12	8	9	10	19	13	12	32	24
APPRENTICE	3	4	3	3	8	3	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	2
GRADE 1	112	107	138	110	88	150	149	7	2	56	111	85	104	66	126	171
In Initial Training	158	137	162	151	128	188	179	24	14	70	125	106	122	86	169	209
Total	732	579	544	528	589	649	543	489	499	641	763	445	469	556	655	707

Discharges from the Defence Forces are recorded under a number of headings without a specific definition of retirement which can be either voluntary or involuntary. The headings range from “at their own request”, purchase of discharge, end of contract or reaching age limits.

The figure of €15 million reported by the media is an estimate, provided by the military authorities, of the cost of training the same number of personnel as those who left voluntarily in 2016. The majority of the estimated cost is the pay of those individuals being trained and the pay of their training staff. There is significant scope for misinterpretation of such cost estimates and it is not accurate to infer that the level of savings reported by the media would occur within the Vote if this number of personnel did not leave the Defence Forces.

As the long terms trends illustrate, departure rates at half the level of those of 2017 have not occurred in the period since 2002. Accordingly, the Department of Defence has not engaged in an estimate of savings for this eventuality.

Ministerial Meetings

102. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or officials in his Department met the British Minister for the Cabinet Office, Mr. David Lidington, when he visited Dublin. [19620/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I met with UK Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington, during his visit to Dublin in April. As the Minister for the Cabinet Office often deputises for the Prime Minister, it is appropriate for me to routinely meet Minister Lidington to discuss issues of importance to both Governments.

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Although the Minister for the Cabinet Office does not have lead responsibility for Brexit, his visit to Dublin, and subsequently to the border region, was welcome and timely, given the importance of the Irish specific issues to the ongoing negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK. It also provided an opportunity to discuss the strong British-Irish bilateral relationship, and how this relationship can be strengthened in the future, including in the context of supporting the restoration of the Executive in Northern Ireland.

Ireland and the UK share many areas of mutual interest and concern and we will continue to work together on areas of commonality.

Brexit Negotiations

103. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on Brexit negotiations being delayed until October 2018; and the detail of the British red-line issues. [19621/18]

107. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if it will be October 2018 before a possible deal will be negotiated on Brexit; and the way in which it will be applied to the Border. [19729/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 107 together.

Following on from the March European Council, the EU and UK agreed to five additional formal rounds of negotiations between April and the next European Council in June. These negotiations are focused on all outstanding issues in the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as the future relationship.

The UK has agreed that a backstop solution for the border will form part of the legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement, in line with paragraph 49 of the Joint Progress Report agreed last December. The UK has also agreed that all the issues identified in the EU draft of the Protocol will be addressed to deliver a legally sound solution for the border.

Prime Minister May confirmed this in her letter to President Tusk of 19 March, in addition to reiterating the UK's commitment last December to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process, including the overarching guarantee on avoiding a hard border.

The Government has always maintained that the backstop will apply unless and until another solution is found. While we share Prime Minister May's preference to resolve these issues through the wider agreement on the EU's future relationship with the UK, it is crucial that we have certainty in all scenarios on the commitments already made on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

It is also the case that the UK's repeatedly stated positions, including its wish to leave the Single Market and the Customs Union, limit the depth of the future partnership and have consequences for the ability of the EU-UK future relationship agreement to deliver on all the commitments and guarantees provided by the UK with regard to protecting North South cooperation, the all island economy and the Good Friday Agreement, including avoiding a hard border.

Negotiations are ongoing, including detailed discussions between the EU and the UK on issues relating to Ireland and Northern Ireland. Significantly more progress is needed on agreeing the Protocol, including the backstop on avoiding a hard border, ahead of the June European

Council.

The EU has always made clear that “*nothing is agreed until everything is agreed*” and that negotiations can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken so far are respected in full. The European Council is therefore continuing to follow the negotiations closely and will return in particular to the remaining withdrawal issues, including the Protocol, and to the framework for the future relationship at its next meeting in June. It is essential that real and substantial progress be made by the June European Council meeting.

The objective of the negotiators is that the full legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement, and a detailed political declaration on the framework for the future relationship, should be concluded by the October European Council. This limited timeframe underlines the urgency of the work ahead in the coming weeks.

Brexit Issues

104. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Mr. Michel Barnier elaborated on the scope of the alignment he referred to in his speech in the context of the Border when they met on 30 April 2018. [19988/18]

108. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he spoke with Mr. Michel Barnier regarding the way in which total alignment would work after Brexit in March 2019. [19731/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 108 together.

The Taoiseach and I met with Michel Barnier, the EU’s Chief Negotiator for the Article 50 negotiations, on 30 April in advance of his address to the All-Island Civic Dialogue. Our meeting offered an opportunity to take stock of the current state of play in the negotiations on both the future relationship and the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including progress on the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

There was agreement at the meeting that significantly more progress is needed on the Protocol, including the backstop on avoiding a hard border, ahead of the June meeting of the European Council. Recalling the European Council Guidelines of 23 March 2018 and the principles that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed and that negotiations can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken so far are respected in full, there was also agreement that there can be no Withdrawal Agreement without a satisfactory agreement on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The backstop for avoiding a hard border, as contained in the draft Protocol, seeks to maintain full alignment with those rules of the Single Market and Customs Union that are necessary to protect North South cooperation, the all-island economy and the Good Friday Agreement, which includes the overarching guarantee of avoiding a hard border. Mr Barnier reaffirmed the importance of this in his address to the All-Island Civic Dialogue on the same day.

Furthermore, this alignment is in the context of the recognition in the Protocol that it is necessary to address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland through a unique solution.

It was not necessary at the meeting to enter into detail on the draft Protocol. Ireland fully supports the Commission’s view that it will be necessary for all the EU rules involved to be listed in annexes to the Protocol. The rules in question would essentially be those dealing with

customs, the free movement of goods, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures relevant to agricultural trade and the movement of animals. Future revision of such rules would also be covered. EU and UK negotiators are continuing work on agreeing the full list of the *acquis* concerned, which is very substantial and detailed.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

105. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; and if he or his officials have held meetings recently on the matter. [19990/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Dealing with long-outstanding issues relating to the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland are of the utmost importance to the Government.

The Programme for a Partnership Government highlights this priority, with specific reference to implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin-Monaghan bombings.

The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin-Monaghan bombings that was adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow.

I want to acknowledge the tireless work of Justice for the Forgotten and of members of this House in supporting and advocating for victims and survivors of the Dublin-Monaghan bombings and their families. I met with Justice for the Forgotten on 17 April last to hear their views and update them on the progress of the request to the British Government.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of the all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government.

I am actively engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from my Department. I recently raised the issue directly with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Karen Bradley on 16 April last.

I have underlined to the British Government that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin-Monaghan atrocities. I have also advised that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and I have emphasised the urgent need for such a response.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government on the request in relation to the Dublin-Monaghan bombings, and pursue all possible avenues that could achieve progress on this issue, consistent with the request made by this House.

Syrian Conflict

106. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the Syria Donor Conference; the measures Ireland is undertaking to press

EU and UN member states to pursue a full diplomatic resolution to the Syrian conflict and increase humanitarian assistance to displaced Syrians who require better solutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20160/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Ireland has consistently been a strong donor to the victims of the Syria crisis. At the Second Brussels Conference for Syria and the Region, Ireland pledged €25 million in humanitarian support for 2018. This brings Ireland's support since 2012 to over €100 million – our largest ever response to a single crisis. Our funding provides supports to those in need inside Syria, as well as Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in the region.

Given my responsibility for International Development, I led Ireland's delegation to the Conference and met with key EU, UN and NGO humanitarian and political partners. These included EU Commissioner Christos Stylianides and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi. At these meetings we reiterated our concerns about the deteriorating humanitarian and protection situation and our commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Ireland is also concerned with supporting longer-term responses for Syrians and host communities affected by the crisis. To this end, we also made a commitment to provide multi-annual, predictable assistance in response to the Syria crisis beyond 2018. In particular, support for learning and protection of young people is an issue that Ireland is committed to do more on. I was honoured therefore to join the Political Champions for Education in Conflict initiative, spearheaded by the Malala Fund and the Education Cannot Wait Fund, at the Conference.

Humanitarian assistance alone will not address the root causes of this crisis however. A comprehensive, sustainable, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led resolution is urgently required to provide lasting relief to the Syrian people. UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is leading political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communique and UN Security Council resolution 2254. Ireland and the EU fully support this process. The EU provides direct assistance to the UN-led Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground. At international level, we use every opportunity to highlight our deep concerns in relation to the Syria crisis. The Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade discussed the situation in Syria with his EU counterparts at their informal meeting on 15 February and again at the Foreign Affairs Council meetings on 26 February, 19 March and 16 April. At their most recent meeting, EU Foreign Ministers reiterated their support for the UN-led political negotiations to end the conflict, and the urgent need to reinvigorate the political track.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 103.

Question No. 108 answered with Question No. 104.

State Claims Agency

109. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the State Claims Agency manages individual cases; the person directly responsible for the running of the State Claims Agency in relation to individual cases; if the delegated State authorities have a say when cases are being managed; if there is transparency between the State Claims Agency and the delegated State authorities regarding the way in which individual cases are being managed; if delegated State authorities are informed of the details on cases that are been taken by the agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19908/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The State Claims Agency (SCA) has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities (DSAs) including the Health Service Executive. The SCA's claims management objective is, while acting in the best interest of taxpayers in matters of personal injury and property damage litigation, to act fairly, ethically and compassionately in its dealings with people who have suffered injuries and/or damage and who take legal actions against the State or State bodies, and their families. In cases where the SCA investigation concludes that the relevant State authority bears some or all liability, it seeks to settle claims expeditiously and on fair and reasonable terms, while seeking to in no way exacerbate the suffering of those citizens. If it considers that the State is not liable, the SCA's policy is to defend the claims.

Individual cases are managed by teams of claims managers within the SCA. The Director of the State Claims Agency (SCA), Ciaran Breen, has oversight of all functions within the SCA.

The State Claims Agency's mandate for managing personal injury claims on behalf of DSAs is established in legislation. When managing cases on behalf of DSAs, the State Claims Agency (SCA) engages with DSAs to carry out investigations and to establish the facts of the cases. The SCA engages with DSAs on an on-going basis in this respect. The SCA is statutorily mandated to determine the claims management strategy on the claims it manages on behalf of DSAs. The SCA engages with DSA's throughout a case. The SCA provides regular information to DSA's in respect of their claims' portfolios.

State Claims Agency

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the policy of the State Claims Agency in relation to non-disclosure and confidentiality clauses being included in circumstances in which settlements are reached in or out of court by the agency and a person taking a case against a State body in respect of cases managed by the agency; the number of such non-disclosure or confidentiality clauses that have been entered into by the agency or representatives on its behalf in each year since 2010 by delegated authority in tabular form; the overall value for each delegated authority for each year of the settlements in which such a clause was put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20118/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The State Claims Agency (SCA) have advised me that it settles very few claims subject to a confidentiality agreement.

For the purposes of clarity the SCA also advise that a claim refers to notification of intention to seek compensation for personal injury and/or property damage where it is alleged the State was negligent. The application may be in the form of a letter of claim, an InjuriesBoard.ie application, or a written/oral request.

One particular exception to a settlement not being subject to a confidentiality agreement is a claim where mediation is entered into. Part of the process of mediation is that the parties are bound by a strict confidentiality provision contained in the mediation agreement. In the very rare case that the Agency agrees a confidentiality proviso, it is usually because of some extremely sensitive, controversial or disputed element of a claim which may be requested by either party.

The SCA also advise that it does not formally record, on its IT system, the fact that any individual settlement is bound by a confidentiality clause; therefore this information is not readily available.

Budget Measures

111. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected net effect of carryover measures carried over for 2019 as a result of budget 2017 measures; the way in which it is accounted for in the fiscal space projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19650/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am assuming the Deputy is referring to Budget 2018 measures. The carryover cost in 2019 of tax measures introduced in Budget 2018 is estimated to be of the order of €14 million. It is important to point out that the exact impact of carryover will be reviewed as part of the normal Budgetary process, as there are several moving parts to be considered, such as economic growth, take up of various schemes and specific tax relevant factors, which could impact on the effect of the measures introduced.

The carryover impact of Budget 2018 current expenditure measures, as published in Expenditure Report 2018, is additional cost of some €300 m arising in 2019.

It should be noted that carryover costs impact the budget calculations in the year which they arise.

Finally, as I have stated on numerous occasions, the Government will formulate budget policy based on what is right for the economy, and will not adopt pro-cyclical policies that jeopardise the sustainability of our public finances and our future living standards.

Budget 2018

112. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the adjustment made for indexation of income tax bands and income tax rates when calculating the fiscal space for budget 2018. [19651/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of the preparations for Budget 2018, it was estimated that the Exchequer yield from non-indexation of the income tax system would be of the order of €0.6 billion on a full year basis.

It is important to point out that the calculation of non-indexation of the income tax system for 2018 was prepared on the basis of the following technical assumptions:

1. The projected increase in non-agricultural wages in 2018 of 3.1%.
2. The Revenue Commissioners Pre-Budget 2018 Ready Reckoner.

As this is a revenue generating measure (discretionary revenue measure) it increases the amount by which government expenditure can increase under the expenditure benchmark rule.

It should be noted that I have been advised by Revenue that Tax Ready Reckoners beyond 2018 are not available. However, it is not expected that the full year yield for the Exchequer from non-indexation of the income tax system beyond 2018 would change significantly from the €0.6 billion stated above.

Furthermore, I am advised by Revenue that the Post-Budget 2018 Ready Reckoner, available at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>, shows on page 10 the cost to the Exchequer of a 1% indexation of a number of credits and bands in 2018. Further changes can be estimated on a pro-rata basis from the information shown.

Excise Duties

113. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected revenue yield from an increase in excise on diesel of five cents per litre; the expected cost of using the diesel rebate scheme to offset such an increase for commercial transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19652/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that an increase in excise duty on diesel of five cents per litre will increase the price by 6.15 cent per litre when VAT is included. The estimated yield from an increase of 6.15 cent per litre is estimated at €166 million in a full year. The additional cost to the diesel rebate scheme to offset such an increase for commercial transport is estimated at €25 million.

VAT Yield

114. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected revenue that would be generated from the restoration of the VAT rate for the hospitality sector from 9% to 13.5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19653/18]

115. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected revenue that would be generated from the restoration of the VAT rate from 9% to 13.5% to the hotel industry, that is, the price of rooms only, excluding the restaurant and pub trade. [19654/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 115 together.

I am informed by The Revenue Commissioners that the Ready Reckoner, available at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf> (page 26), shows the impact of increases in VAT rates, including the 9% rate.

As shown in the Ready Reckoner, the yield from the restoration of the VAT rate from 9% to 13.5% across all goods and services is likely to be in the region of €520m for 2018. A tentative estimate of the yield from the restoration of the VAT rate from 9% to 13.5% specific to the accommodation sector is likely to be in the region of €220m for 2018. Both estimates assume no resulting change in consumer behavior.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

116. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance if a person who is taking part in a community employment scheme has to pay the universal social charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19670/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Payments made to participants in Community Employment Schemes are not liable to the Universal Social Charge. These payments are treated as social welfare payments and are therefore exempt from the Universal Social Charge under section 531 AM of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Universal Social Charge Data

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue received from

the universal social charge, both PAYE and self assessment, in 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19679/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that net receipts for the Universal Social Charge (USC) in 2017 were €3,131 million for PAYE and €577 million for non-PAYE.

Net receipts for USC in 2018 to-date are €1,073 million for PAYE and €42 million for non-PAYE.

Motor Insurance

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the fact that some insurance companies refuse to quote for private motor insurance cover if the policyholder has had a claim in the past number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19710/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland has the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing or provision of insurance products. Indeed, the EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting such rules. The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. These are considered by insurance companies on a case-by-case basis.

Motor insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Factors include, for example, the age and type of the vehicle, the age of the driver, the relevant driving experience, the claims record of the driver, the number of drivers and how the vehicle is used. Their own previous claims experience in this area will also be a relevant factor.

Finally, as the Deputy may be aware, under the terms of the Declined Cases Agreement (DCA), which is adhered to by all motor insurers in Ireland, if a consumer is unable to secure a quotation on the open market, he or she may be in a position to avail of the Declined Cases Agreement (DCA) process. Under the terms of the DCA, the insurance market will not refuse to provide insurance to an individual seeking insurance if the person has approached at least three insurers and has not been able to obtain cover from them. In this regard, there are further details available on the Insurance Ireland website while Insurance Ireland also operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. The relevant contact details are: feedback@insuranceireland.eu or declined@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Tax Code

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if sparkling water is included in the sugar sweetened drink tax; if his attention has been drawn to cases in which retailers have increased prices of soft drinks and sparkling water in advance of the tax introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19737/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax is pro-

vided for by Chapter 2 of Part 1 of the Finance Act 2017. The tax commenced on 1 May 2018 and applies to first supplies in the State of sugar sweetened drinks. Sugar sweetened drinks are water and juice based drinks, in ready to consume or concentrated form, that contain added sugar and have a total sugar content of 5 grams or more per 100 millilitres in their ready to consume form.

Sparkling water is not subject to the tax unless it has added sugar which results in a total sugar content of 5 grams or more per 100 millilitres. Comprehensive details regarding the operation of the tax are provided on the Revenue website at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/excise-and-licences/sugar-sweetened-drinks-tax/index.aspx>.

Vehicle Registration

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that the application of VRT on imported vehicles is fully in accordance with EU law in all respects; his plans to introduce changes to the regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19771/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that section 132(1), Finance Act, 1992 provided for the introduction, from 1 January 1993, of “a duty of excise, to be called vehicle registration tax”. VRT is a tax on the registration of a vehicle and is not a tax on the importation of a vehicle. Section 132(1) also specifies that the tax “shall be charged, levied and paid ... on ... the registration of a vehicle”.

Article 110 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (ex Article 90 TEC) provides that Member States cannot levy taxes that discriminate against imported goods or provide unfair protection to domestic goods. Over the years, the European Court of Justice, in a number of opinions and rulings, has stated that the charging of a tax such as VRT is within the competence of a Member State provided that it does not breach Article 110 of the TFEU.

I am satisfied that the Vehicle Registration tax as a whole is compatible with the provisions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

I will be introducing two significant changes to the VRT regime. The first of these will be implemented from 1 January 2019 and will address the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 19 September 2017 in respect of a proportionate payment of VRT on cars leased from other Member States (where the cars are only intended to be in the State for a temporary pre-determined period). The second will address the introduction of the Worldwide Light vehicle Test Procedure (WLTP) for CO2 emissions.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

121. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department or a State agency under his remit has availed of the services of companies (details supplied) since 2011; if so, the details of the expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19822/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): No invoices were received by my Department, however please see the following response from state agencies under my remit relating to Diskshred Ltd. or Asset Management Ireland in the years 2011 to 2018.

Of the seventeen bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that fifteen have not availed of the services of the companies, Diskshred Ltd or Asset Management Ireland since

2011. The Irish Bank Resolution Corporation and The Office of the Revenue Commissioners availed of the services of Diskshred Ltd/Asset Management Ireland. The details are set out in the following table:

-	Availed of the services of companies (Diskshred Ltd or Asset Management Ireland) since 2011	Details of the expenditure
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation	Yes	In the period 2011-2012, payments totalling €8,968.17 were made to Asset Management (Ireland) Limited/Diskshred Limited. 2011 €4,766.87 2012 €4,201.30 No payments have been made since the date of liquidation to Asset Management (Ireland) Limited/Diskshred Limited.
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Yes	For data removal and disposal services 2011 €491.87 2012 €841.33 2013 NIL 2014 €329.62 2015 NIL 2016 NIL 2017 NIL

State Claims Agency Data

122. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims pending against the State Claims Agency at present by claim type, category and county in which the claimant is based; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19902/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question the State Claims Agency (SCA) have supplied the following table regarding active claims, broken down by Incident/Hazard Category recorded on the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as of 4 May 2018. The SCA advise that they do not record the county in which a claimant is located in a reportable manner on the NIMS. The table and the report excludes Property Damage Recovery Claims.

Table: Active claims recorded on NIMS as of 4 May 2018

Incident/Hazard Category	Number of Active Claims
Clinical Care	3,163
Crash/Collision	487
Exposure to Behavioural Hazards	1,393
Exposure to Biological Hazards	257
Exposure to Chemical Hazards	275
Exposure to Physical Hazards	2,147
Exposure to Psychological hazards	2,514
Property Damage/Loss (non crash/collision)	202
Unknown (Awaiting Claim Investigation)	9
Grand Total	10,447

For the benefit of the Deputy's understanding the SCA has advised the following definitions

in relation to the table.

National Incident Management System (NIMS): Incidents (which include claims) are reported using the “National Incident Management System”. This is hosted by the State Claims Agency (SCA) for the HSE, other Healthcare enterprises and Delegated State Authorities. An incident can be a harmful Incident (Adverse Event), no harm incident, near miss, dangerous occurrence (reportable circumstance) or complaint. An Incident can relate to a person, property, crash/collision, dangerous occurrence or complaint.

Claim: A claim refers to notification of intention to seek compensation for personal injury and/or property damage where it is alleged the State was negligent. The application may be in the form of a letter of claim, an InjuriesBoard.ie application, or a written/oral request.

Incident/hazard category: The adapted World Health Organisation (WHO) taxonomy of incident types. This field breaks down an incident into pre-defined categories, e.g. Clinical Care, Exposure to Physical Hazards, Crashes/Collisions, etc.

Examples of Incident/Hazard Categories:

‘Clinical Care’ would include Birth Specific Procedures, Clinical Procedures.

‘Exposure to Behavioural Hazards’ would include Violence, Harassment and Aggression, Self Injurious Behaviour.

‘Exposure to Biological Hazards’ would include Bacteria, Virus.

‘Exposure to Chemical Hazards’ would include Sanitation/Cleaning Chemicals.

‘Exposure to Physical Hazards’ would include Slips, Trips, Falls,

‘Exposure to Psychological hazards’ would include Wrongful Exposure, Wrongful Death.

‘Property Damage/Loss (non crash/collision)’ would include Personal Belongings, Vehicle.

Tax Code

123. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an incorrect tax certificate was issued to a person (details supplied). [19927/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the tax position of the person in question has been examined and is correct.

Revenue has also confirmed that it has already been in direct contact with the person in regard to the issue, which seems to relate to payroll processing by their employer.

Tax Code

124. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) who is newly employed by the Education and Training Board, ETB, is deemed exempt from the universal social charge, USC, in the last quarter of the person’s first year in employment in view of the fact the Revenue Commissioners is seeking to recoup the USC from the person in the following year causing financial hardship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20032/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the person had an underpayment of Universal Social Charge for 2016. The underpayment arose because Revenue was not informed of the change in his employment circumstances. This resulted in his tax credits for the year being applied at previous years' rates which were below the USC threshold.

Revenue originally advised the person that the shortfall would be collected by reducing his tax credits over the course of 2018. This would have resulted in a reduction of just under €16 per week in his take home pay. Following discussions with the individual, Revenue agreed to collect the liability by reducing his tax credits over the years 2018 to 2021 (inclusive). The impact on his take home pay is a reduction of just under €4 per week.

Stamp Duty

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has signed the commencement order for farm consolidation relief of stamp duty as provisioned in section 68 of the Finance Act 2017; if not, when he will do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20067/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have outlined in a number of PQ replies recently, the measure legislated for in section 68 of Finance Act 2017 will allow a farmer to claim relief from stamp duty where he or she sells and purchases land for the purposes of consolidating an existing farm holding has been introduced, subject to a commencement order after a full consideration of any administrative or EU state-aid requirements.

For the relief to operate, there must be both a sale and a purchase of land within a period of 24 months of each other. Where other qualifying conditions are satisfied, stamp duty will only be paid to the extent that the value of the land that is purchased exceeds the value of the land that is sold. A reduced rate of 1% will be charged on the excess, if any, of the purchase value. If the sale takes place before the purchase, then relief will be given at the time of purchase. However, if the purchase takes place first, then stamp duty will have to be paid but can subsequently be refunded when the sale takes place.

A number of qualifying conditions must be satisfied before the relief can apply. The most important condition is that Teagasc must issue a certificate stating that a sale and purchase or an exchange of farmland was made for farm consolidation purposes. This is the certificate that is currently required in relation to the capital gains tax relief. The criteria to be used by Teagasc for this purpose and the information to be supplied to Teagasc are contained in guidelines published by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine:

(<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/formsdownloads/V12CGTGuidelinesfinal060315.pdf>).

A purchaser of farmland must retain ownership of the farmland for a period of five years and must use the land for farming. Where any part of the land is disposed of before the end of this five-year holding period, the stamp duty relieved can subsequently be recovered by Revenue, or partly recovered as appropriate.

The measure will apply to all transactions which took place after 1 January 2018, so farmers who consolidate their holdings prior to the commencement of the relief will still be eligible.

I understand that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has recently made an application to the European Commission for State Aid approval of the measure and that their

response is awaited. Therefore, at this point, no definitive date for the commencement of the relief can be provided. I would again wish to emphasise that, subject to state-aid approval and commencement, any eligible consolidation that takes place on or after 1 January 2018 and on or before 31 December 2020 will benefit from the consolidation measure introduced in section 68 of Finance Act 2017 (No 41 of 2017).

Foreign Earnings Deduction

126. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of a proposal (details supplied) over a full calendar year. [20093/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Foreign Earnings Deduction applies to taxpayers who work abroad during a tax year and one of the conditions of receiving the deduction is that the taxpayer must work in a relevant state, of which there are 30 eligible states. All of these 30 relevant states are non EEA states.

I am advised by Revenue that given the number of variable factors involved, for example, the extra uptake as a result of the broadening of the incentive; the number of qualifying days that might be worked abroad; and the salary level of the additional taxpayers that may take up this deduction, it is not possible to estimate the additional cost to the Exchequer of the Deputy's proposal with any degree of reliability.

Tax Reliefs Costs

127. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of a proposal (details supplied) over a full calendar year. [20094/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP) is available to employees of companies that are incorporated and tax resident in a country with which Ireland has a double taxation agreement or a Tax Information Exchange Agreement. SMEs are not currently excluded from availing of SARP, as long as they meet this condition.

I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to provide an estimated cost for extending SARP as outlined as the likely additional uptake of the scheme in such circumstances is not known nor are the rates of pay of the employees who might avail of the extended scheme.

With regard to new hires, under existing legislation the employee must have worked for that employer for a minimum of 6 months outside of Ireland immediately before being assigned to work in Ireland. (This condition is, in part, intended to avoid the possible disadvantaging of Irish-resident job candidates over non-resident job candidates.)

However, as the deputy may be aware, in Budget 2018 I introduced the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) with the objective of supporting SMEs in Ireland in competing with larger enterprises to recruit and retain key employees.

Tax Credits

128. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of increasing the earned income tax credit for the self-employed by amounts (details

supplied) over a full calendar year. [20095/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the cost of increases to the earned income tax credit as requested by the Deputy can be found on page 6 of the Ready Reckoner which is available at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>. While some of the costs of the increases sought by the Deputy are not displayed in the Ready Reckoner, those not included can be estimated on a straight-line or pro-rata basis from the costs shown.

Insurance Compensation Fund

129. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a compensation scheme for third party claimants of a company (details supplied); the timeframe for the introduction of the scheme; if the scheme will be made a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20108/18]

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

The Deputy will be aware that under the Insurance Act 1964, as amended, monies may be paid out of the Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF), with the approval of the High Court, in relation to an insolvent insurer, to meet claims up to a limit of 65% or €825,000 of the claim, whichever is the lesser.

The Deputy will also be aware of my decision in principle that the State will ensure that Setanta third party claimants are compensated in full, which was announced on 30 January. The Department of Finance has received confirmation from the Office of the Attorney General that there are no state-aid or other legal issues with this decision, and has therefore proceeded with the detailed arrangements to implement it. An additional provision to give effect to this decision is being included in the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, which is currently being finalised by my officials in liaison with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and is expected to be published shortly. Once this is done the likely timeline for payment will become clearer, including the payment of the additional 35% to those who have settled their claims and have already received compensation of 65% of their claim subject to the limit outlined above.

It is however important to note that only claims which have been settled can be included in applications to the High Court for payment from the ICF. The process of settling claims is still ongoing and is subject in some cases to complex negotiations between all relevant parties. It is hoped that by the State taking steps to ensure that third party claimants are compensated in full, this will encourage the settlement of all outstanding claims as quickly as possible.

Banking Sector

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that the main banks are making adequate resources available to facilitate the urgently required house building programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20203/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the deputy is aware the banks continue to increase their new lending to the economy including to the construction sector. I have

been provided with the following information from both AIB and Bank of Ireland:

AIB

“This is an area of strategic importance for the economy and the Bank. AIB is strongly supportive of the industry and we are ready and willing to increase our support as the industry grows.

We are the main bank to many of the largest developers but we also have a strong focus on mid-sized developers. We created a new dedicated team in 2017 to serve mid-sized development groups following feedback from the industry that they struggled to get the attention of mainstream Banks. This new Mid-Market team is active across the Country.

Overall, we more than doubled the size of the Bank’s Development Lending Team over the last 12-months. This was done in anticipation of a marked pick-up in residential development activity in Ireland. Consequently, we expect to double our residential development lending in 2018.

On Social Housing, we are backing a number of specific developments which are being sold to Approved Housing Bodies and we have ring-fenced a €100 million Fund to further support this aspect of the market.

Regarding Student Housing, the Bank has been very active and is funding over 1,500 beds which will help the overall housing market.

Finally, we are providing on-site presence at weekends to assist mortgage seekers to get loan approvals to purchase new homes which in turn helps developers get units sold. “

BOI

“Supporting construction and development has always been a core part of Bank of Ireland’s strategy. The Bank plays a key role in supporting our customer and clients’ ambitions and projects, and has a €1 billion fund for construction and development - approximately 80% of which is targeted to Ireland. This supports the development of houses, apartments and student accommodation. We are currently financing 3,500 housing units and 1,600 student beds in Ireland.

We are well positioned to increase our output this year. Our strategy for house-building is to fund the acquisition of land that is “shovel ready” – supporting Irish Government policy by encouraging house-building and discouraging land hoarding.”

Departmental Contingency Planning

131. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of funds set aside on an annual basis for contingent liability for the past ten years to date in 2018; the way in which it is determined the amount that is forecast to be needed for contingent liability; if he carries out an actuarial analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability; if he conducts a risk assessment in the context of contingent liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20066/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Financial Procedures set out that a contingent liability arises in any situation where past or current actions or events create a risk of a call on Exchequer funds in the future. Contingent liabilities are not recognised in the statement of financial position but are disclosed by way of a note to the appropriation account unless the possibility of an outflow of resources is remote.

In terms of my own Department, since its establishment in 2011, there have been a small number of items disclosed in the notes of the annual appropriation account of the Department with regard to contingent liabilities, most of which relate to legal costs. At present, one involves a legal case where costs have been awarded against the Department but have yet to be determined.

To date, the nature of the contingent liabilities related to my Department has not required actuarial services to estimate current and future contingent liabilities. However, the Department through its own financial and risk assessment processes identifies possible contingent liabilities as well as estimating the possible liability.

Public Parks

132. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the budget that has been allocated for the enhancement and refurbishment of the Phoenix Park in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19765/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works have allocated €550,000 for the enhancement and refurbishment of the Phoenix Park in 2018.

The Phoenix Park is the largest enclosed public city park in a major capital in Europe. Capital works are undertaken as needs arise and are funded separately from within the OPW Vote. Staffing and general maintenance costs are also funded separately from within the OPW Vote.

Public Parks

133. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the budget that has been allocated for the visit of Pope Francis to the Phoenix Park in August 2018; the number of persons expected to visit the park; the preparatory work to be carried out to cater for the large crowds; the budget for restoring the park after the Pope's visit has ended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19766/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): It is not possible to provide a fully costed estimate for the visit of Pope Francis to the Phoenix Park in August this year as arrangements for the event have yet to be finalised.

It is expected that the number of people visiting the park that day will not exceed 600,000.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) is undertaking preparatory works that will cater for the health, safety and welfare of those attending. These works will include the widening of gates (this will be a temporary measure – all gates will be restored to their existing positions after the event), the identification and lining of routes or pathways within the park, and the installation of welfare hubs, way-finding, security and stewarding facilities. A nationwide Traffic and Pedestrian Management Plan is currently under development to cater for the large crowds expected to attend, the details of which will be conveyed to the public through the Government Information Service in due course.

It is not expected that there will be any significant damage done to the park. The weather leading up to the event, and on the day itself, will have some bearing on this.

Public Parks

134. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has examined the impact of the Papal visit to Ireland in 1979 on the Phoenix Park; the lessons learned by the OPW from restoration works that were carried out in the park; if it is planned to temporarily remove gates to the park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19767/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works have considerable experience in management of large-scale events in the Phoenix Park. The OPW team is closely working with organisers, contractors and World Meeting of Families to ensure that the event is managed safely and that the park is restored to pristine condition as soon as possible after the event.

Given the scale of the event, it will be necessary to remove gates to the park to safely allow egress of the participants.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

135. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of assistant principal grade positions that will become available in County Westmeath in 2019 in respect of each Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19798/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is an independent, statutory body which provides professional recruitment and selection services to the civil and public service.

I am informed that the PAS currently has panels in place for the grade of Assistant Principal from competitions held in late 2016 and early 2017. These competitions were held in order to create panels of qualified individuals from which departments could draw when filling sanctioned vacancies.

The establishment of a panel for a location(s) is based on demand as notified to PAS. Vacancies will be filled, including vacancies in County Westmeath, if any, as and when required by employing departments.

Public Sector Staff

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the procedures adopted under the mobility policy; if it is possible for a person to move backwards on the list; the circumstances in which such could occur; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19904/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Phase 1A of the Civil Service Mobility scheme was launched for Clerical Officers and Executive Officers to apply for mobility in November 2017. Over 3,300 staff members have applied for mobility since its launch. As a matter of policy for the scheme, applicants are queued by date of application in the first instance, and length of service in the second instance.

It was open to applicants to enter a legacy date on their initial Mobility application from 13/11/2017 until 07/02/2018. This was to facilitate the inclusion of legacy dates from previous

transfer applications made through legacy transfer lists (including the Central Applications Facility, Central Transfer Lists, and Internal Regional Transfer Lists) on a voluntary opt-in basis.

A legacy date is applicable to each public service branch (PSB) in a Mobility Zone, and requires verification from the respective owner of the legacy transfer List. Once the legacy date has been verified for a PSB in a zone, it can be applied to all of the other PSB's within that zone. There is a period of 20 business days allocated for legacy date verification.

An applicant may see their waitlist position drop in the following circumstances:

- The legacy date which they entered on their Mobility application has not been verified within the time allocated for this; in such cases their application date will revert to the date of entering their application on the Mobility system;

- Where an applicant goes on a leave of absence, they may see their placing on the relevant waitlist drop if their length of service drops below that of another officer with the same application date;

- Where an officer's Mobility applications have been cancelled through no fault of their own, and not in accordance with policy, they are subsequently re-entered with the original application details. When an application is re-entered, it can result in other officers on the same waitlist(s) dropping in position;

- Amendment to an officer's application date has been allowed through specific policy provision. Examples include:

- The legacy date entered by an applicant on their initial application has not carried to all of the PSB waitlists in a zone due to a technical error which was present on the system for a number of days during the legacy date application period. When this is found to have occurred, the application is amended to reflect the legacy date entered by an applicant in good faith;

- Where an officer entered a legacy date which was later than that they were entitled to on the basis of erroneous information from the Central Application Facility;

- An officer has made an individual appeal to Mobility Policy to have their Mobility application(s) amended to include an earlier application date, and this has been facilitated. The circumstances of these cases may vary.

Departmental Staff Data

137. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of transfers of Department of Justice and Equality staff planned in 2018 and 2019 in zone 7 under the mobility policy section; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19905/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Phase 1A of the Civil Service Mobility scheme was launched for Clerical Officers and Executive Officers to apply for mobility in November 2017. Over 3,300 staff members have applied for mobility since its launch.

When the Mobility system becomes operational for organisations to initiate transfers, vacant posts will be filled in accordance with the following organisational sequence.

CO – 50% Mobility : 50% Open;

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EO – 40% Open : 30% Interdepartmental* : 30% Internal.

*one in every two Interdepartmental vacancies to be filled by Mobility.

The above sequencing will be applied on a nationwide basis per Department.

However it is neither possible to predict how many roles will become vacant in 2018 and 2019 or how these sequences will be applied specifically in Zone 7.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme

138. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the phase 2 restoration works to a site (details supplied) will be considered as part of the recently announced Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027 under the historic environment or built heritage investment programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20148/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The proposed Phase 2 of work at Maynooth Castle would, in the first instance, fall to be considered in the context of the funds recently announced in respect of Built Heritage.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) are currently working with the funding Department (DCHG) to identify where these recently announced additional resources will be allocated.

Office of Public Works

139. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated revenue in respect of events (details supplied); the arrangements to be made to reimburse the Phoenix Park to undertake reinstatement works following large crowd events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20162/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Bloom Garden event and the proposed Papal Mass are Government- supported events and thus a facility fee is not charged in either case.

With regard to the “Ed Sheeran” concerts, the fees charged are commercially sensitive but are in line with fees charged at other similar venues. As is normal practice for such events, OPW has sought a substantial bond from the event promoter to fund any reinstatement works which may be necessary following these concerts.

Departmental Legal Cases

140. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will request the State Claims Agency to provide information as to whether or not any of the seven settlements made as part of the ex gratia scheme set up following the judgment in a case (details supplied) were as a result of physical abuse only. [20201/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In earlier responses to Parliamentary Questions, I explained to the Deputy that because the type of abuse suffered by an individual is personal to that individual, the information can not be disclosed by any State body or organisation holding that data.

Special Educational Needs

141. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the review of career guidance services in schools, higher education institutes and colleges of further education will include special schools; and his plans to provide career guidance to the 16 to 18 year old persons attending special schools who are not in receipt of the service. [19611/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of the review of career guidance is to ensure that we are providing high quality, relevant career guidance information to students from post-primary level up to further and higher education. The review will look at the quality of information available to students and adults in relation to career guidance, the sources of this information and how the system is organised to support students and adults in this area. The review is being carried out by independent consultants and will be guided and informed by a Steering Group. As part of the consultants proposed methodological approach to the review, my Department has invited submissions from all interested stakeholders to assist in shaping the review by highlighting key issues to be considered in the course of carrying out the review. Drawing on the results of the consultation and further consideration by the Steering Group the question of the role and objectives of career guidance in supporting students in special schools will be considered further. The closing date for receipt of submissions is Friday 25th May 2018. Details surrounding the consultation process have been published on the Department's website (www.education.ie).

In relation to career guidance for 16-18 year old persons attending special schools, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS) for determining the appropriate staffing levels in special schools. Enhanced pupil teacher and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupil's educational and care needs. Special schools are staffed based on their actual current pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to primarily by school designation, in recognition that many special schools now enrol students from disability categories other than those provided for by their original school designations. This process means that it is for school authorities to determine its staffing requirements in accordance with the requirements of the cohort of students attending the school which includes how best to use that resource to cater for curricular content.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

142. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements which will be made to accommodate a child (details supplied) in Dublin 9 with a place in an autism specific unit in a mainstream school in their locality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19640/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

The greater proportion of children with Autism attend mainstream classes, but some require the environment of a special class or special school. This decision is based a recommendation

contained within a professional assessment in consultation with the NCSE.

Students enrolling in specialised placements must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals stating that:

- S/he has a disability (in line with the designation of the special placement in question) and
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a specialised setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,304 for the 2017/18 school year. 1,048 of these are ASD special classes.

125 special schools also provide specialist education for those students with complex special educational needs, including students diagnosed with ASD.

With regard to Co. Dublin in particular, there are 37 special schools and 218 special classes attached to mainstream schools. Of these, 18 are ASD early intervention classes, 124 are primary ASD classes and 36 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 178 in 2017/2018.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need in Dublin from year to year, and where special provision, including special class provision, is required, it is planned and established to meet that need. This process is ongoing.

The NCSE has informed my Department that they intend to establish approx. 18 new ASD Special Classes in Co. Dublin for 2018/19 school year to meet currently identified need.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local SENO who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible.

Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school placement, for the 2018/19 school year, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE will continue to work with schools, parents, NEPS, health professionals and other staff who are involved in the provision of services in the area referred to by the Deputy for children with special educational needs, to ensure that each child has a placement appropriate to their needs for the 2018/19 school year.

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular child, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention and direct reply.

Student Grant Scheme

143. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of increasing the non-adjacent maintenance grant to €4,025 for full-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. [19646/18]

144. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of increasing the adjacent maintenance grant of €2,215 for full-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. [19647/18]

145. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of extending a non-adjacent maintenance grant of €4,025 to part-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. [19648/18]

146. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of extending an adjacent maintenance grant of €2,215 to part-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. [19649/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 to 146, inclusive, together.

The current standard rate of full maintenance grant (non-adjacent rate) is €3,025. For the academic year 2016/17 there were 19,440 undergraduate and postgraduate students who qualified for this grant rate. If the grant was increased by €1,000 and a similar number of students qualified, the cost would be €19,440,000.

The current standard rate of full maintenance grant (adjacent rate) is €1,215. For the academic year 2016/17 there were 16,759 undergraduate and postgraduate students who qualified for this grant rate. If the grant was increased by €1,000 and a similar number of students qualified, the cost would be €16,759,000.

Students on part-time courses are not eligible for SUSI grants. As such, my Department has no means tested statistical data available to determine the number of part-time students who might qualify for student grants. The latest statistics from the HEA for the number of part-time students in publicly funded institutions, record a total of 21,988 undergraduate students and 15,645 postgraduate students. If the full maintenance grant (both adjacent and non-adjacent) were extended to part-time students, then the cost would be €4,025 or €2,215 per qualifying student.

Approximately 20% of full-time students qualify for the full maintenance grant with circa 54% on the non-adjacent rate and circa 46% on the adjacent rate. Applying these percentages to the number of part-time students would indicate that circa 4,065 students would qualify for the non-adjacent rate of maintenance grant at a cost of €16,361,625 and 3,462 students would qualify for the adjacent rate of maintenance grant at a cost of €7,668,330. However, it should be noted that qualifying full-time students also receive a fee grant of up to €6,270. If this was provided to part-time students then it could potentially add a further €47,194,290 to the costings.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

147. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for funding under the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19655/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, under Category 9 - Curricular Requirement Works. The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is designed to allow schools to carry out small and medium sized building works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings.

The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is a multi-annual Scheme. Over 1,650 schools, nearly 50% of schools, applied for inclusion under the current round of the scheme which reflects a very high demand.

Almost €80 million has been approved under the current round of the Scheme, in respect of 635 school projects, 464 primary and 171 post-primary schools, for Gas, electrical upgrades, mechanical, sanitation and roof improvement works.. Details of the successful school applicants, are published on the Department's website www.education.ie.

In relation to the Summer Works Scheme 2018, over €25 million will be spent on summer works projects in 2018. This expenditure will enable the remaining approved improvement works for 178 schools nationwide to be completed. These works will be carried out by the schools themselves on a devolved basis mainly over the summer months, so the disruption to students, teachers and other school staff will be kept to a minimum.

Furthermore, the Department intends to engage with the relevant education partners in relation to giving schools a better lead-in period for planning and delivering projects under the summer works scheme from 2019 onwards. While the Summer Works Scheme is hugely successful in enabling small scale refurbishment works to be done on a devolved basis, the Department considers that the operation of the scheme could be improved by providing a better lead-in period for schools rather than in Quarter 2 as in previous years. This will also help ensure that works done under the Summer Works Scheme fit better with any wider refurbishment/energy retrofit plans that may be done at schools under the increased funding provided in the National Development Plan. The engagement with education partners will commence shortly and will assist in developing a better timeline for the planning and delivery of summer works projects for 2019 onwards.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

148. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) which provides special services for autistic children is oversubscribed; his views on whether the new school that is being built in 2019 can cater for that oversubscription; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19656/18]

149. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a child (details supplied) has been denied a place in a school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19657/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 149 together.

My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled students with special educational needs, including those with Autism in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw

from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special school and special class placements.

This network includes 130 ASD early intervention classes, 635 primary ASD classes and 277 post-primary ASD classes in mainstream schools and 125 Special schools of which 20 are ASD special schools.

Students with ASD should be included in mainstream schools unless this is not in their best interests or the interests of those with whom they are to be educated. Some students with ASD with more complex special educational needs may be supported in a special class in a mainstream school.

Others may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

This decision is based a recommendation contained within a professional assessment in consultation with the NCSE.

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year, and where special provision is required it is planned and established to meet that need.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local SENO who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE has advised that the local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) is continuing to liaise with the parents of the child referred to by the Deputy and has identified a number of suitable school placements in which they may enrol their child for the forthcoming school year.

The school referred to by the Deputy is a special school which provides for the special educational needs of children with Autism who have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

The school is due to proceed to tender at the end of this month for the delivery of a new 2-storey 6-classroom base Special Needs school including a General Purpose Hall, all staff and pupil facilities and ancillary spaces.

The NCSE have informed my Department that the additional placements this project will deliver will meet the projected need for students with ASD and complex needs requiring a special school in the area.

Student Universal Support Ireland

150. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the time limits used by SUSI when determining qualification by a person for a third level grant; the way in which a person can retrospectively gain an award they are entitled to; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [19692/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the provisions of the annual student grant scheme and in order to deliver an efficient service and timely outcomes for students, SUSI implements key dates relevant to the submission and processing of student grant applications.

The SUSI online student grant application system for the 2017/18 academic year opened on 3 April 2017. Students were encouraged through all SUSI communication channels, including a national media advertising campaign and via the SUSI website, social media, publications, student/college outreach events, media and stakeholder information services, to apply before the published priority application processing dates of 15 June (renewing applicants) and 13 July (new applicants); so that their applications could be received and processed with priority by SUSI in advance of the commencement of the academic year in September 2017.

Following these dates, the online system remained fully open for all application types until the closing of the system on 2 November 2017.

In advance of the closing of the system on 2 November, students who had commenced on-line applications for the 2017/18 academic year but who had not completed and submitted their applications were e-mailed encouraging them to complete and submit their applications before 2 November.

The decision regarding whether to accept or reject a late application is a matter for SUSI and my Department has no role in this matter. Late applications received after 2 November will only be accepted by SUSI where: a course commences after this date; a change in circumstances occurs e.g. a change to a student's nationality; or for extenuating circumstances that adversely affected the student e.g. a serious illness, death of an immediate family member etc.

Under Article 34 of the Student Grant Scheme, no application can be accepted later than "one month before the end of the academic year to which the application relates".

School Accommodation Provision

151. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 183 of 6 February 2018, the status of plans for the development of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19709/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department has recently approved grant-aid at the school referred to for the provision of an ASD Unit and general classroom accommodation. The relevant ETB has been informed of the decision and an approval letter, outlining the terms and conditions of the grant, will issue shortly.

Site Acquisitions

152. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a site (details supplied) will be considered as a new secondary school for south County Kildare. [19718/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I would like to thank the Deputy for the details supplied in this instance. In the event a new school is required, the Department will examine all potential options, including those in state ownership.

Schools Building Projects Status

153. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application by a school (details supplied) for additional space; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19741/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for significant capital funding to provide additional classroom accommodation and a general purpose room.

My Department advised the school that the current priority is the provision of additional mainstream classrooms where a new teaching post has been sanctioned and cannot be accommodated within the existing school building. The school in question did not qualify for an additional post and on that basis, the school's application was unsuccessful.

In relation to the school's application for a General Purpose Room, the Deputy will be aware that the government will increase the funding provided for the school sector's capital investment programme. Under the National Development Plan, this funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings to include the building and modernisation of PE facilities in primary and post-primary schools.

Schools Building Projects

154. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be inaugurated; the process for the selection of a school patron and a permanent site for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19762/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new 800 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Blanchardstown_West_D15 & BlanchardstownVge_D15 school planning areas as a regional solution. This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools will be determined as part of the site acquisition process.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department's website.

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) is currently being developed by my Depart-

ment to provide objective information to all parents which will allow them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parental preferences are currently collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies.

Schools Building Projects

155. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposed new schools in west County Dublin in the new school building programme; the rationale underlining his plan in respect of demographic projections, future population growth and patronage mix; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19763/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including the following schools for the West County Dublin area:

- 8 classroom primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Newcastle_Rathcoole school planning area

- 8 classroom primary school to be established in 2021 to serve the Clondalkin_D22 school planning area

- 1,000 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Tallaght & Newcastle_Rathcoole school planning areas as a regional solution

- 800 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2020 to serve the Blanchardstown_West_D15 and BlanchardstownVge_D15 school planning areas as a regional solution

This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. Based on the current analysis, this need can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

I have highlighted that the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department's website.

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) is currently being developed by my Depart-

ment to provide objective information to all parents which will allow them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parental preferences are currently collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies.

Schools Building Projects

156. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new schools at primary and second level to be established in respect of the Cabra and Phibsborough Dublin 7 school planning areas; the number of proposed school refurbishments; the number of proposed school amalgamations in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19764/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

While the announcement did not include a new school for the Cabra_Phibsboro_D7 school planning area, a new 8 classroom primary school and a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school were announced to open in 2019 and 2022 respectively in the adjacent Drumcondra_Marino_Dublin 1 school planning area. In addition, a new 16 classroom primary school (Broombridge Educate Together National School) was established in 2016 to serve the Cabra_Phibsboro_D7 school planning area. As part of the demographic exercises, it was established that there is significant existing capacity at post-primary level in this school planning area.

The current status of all building projects, including those referred to by the Minister may be viewed on my Department's website www.education.ie – Schools & Colleges - Building Works. My Department is not aware of any proposed amalgamations in the area referred to by the Deputy.

Apprenticeship Data

157. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship registrations in craft based apprenticeships; the number in new apprenticeships in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19769/18]

158. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship programmes operational in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018. [19770/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 158 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out on the tabular statement.

Apprenticeship registrations

-	2016	2017	2018 (to end April)
Craft apprenticeships			
Registrations per annum	3,742	4508	1,515
Consortia led apprenticeships			
Registrations per annum	79	335	50
Total	3,821	4,843	1,565

Consortia led operational programmes

Year	Cumulative operational programmes
2016	2
2017	9
2018 (to date)	11

Schools Building Projects Status

159. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if stage 2B of a school (details supplied) has been completed; if the project has moved to the stage 3 tender process; and if the transfer and conveyance of the land is not impeding this project from proceeding. [19875/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

My Department recently completed the review of the Stage 2b submission for this project and comments have issued. Each member of the design team has been requested to submit written confirmations that they have completed a final review and are satisfied that the tender documentation is fully compliant with the Department's Technical Guidance Documents, Building Control (Amendment) regulations and new Public Works Contract (PWC) tender documentation requirements.

Upon receipt of the requested confirmations and providing no other issues arise it is currently projected that this project will then be authorised to complete pre-qualification of contractors. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

Regarding the site, my Department is currently progressing the conveyancing process in consultation with the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

At this point it is not anticipated that the completion of conveyancing will impact upon the timelines for the delivery of the building project.

Schools Building Projects Status

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the schedule of accommodation will be announced in the case of a school (details supplied); and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [19888/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme. In the context of progressing the building project, my Department has undertaken a site visit to the school and schedules of accommodation are currently being prepared.

The building project will be devolved to Kildare Wicklow Education & Training Board (KWETB) for delivery and it is my Department's intention to engage with KWETB shortly in this regard.

Autism Support Services

161. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the closure of a unit (details supplied). [19924/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has advised the NCSE to approve the continuation of the early intervention special class for children with a diagnosis of ASD, referred to by the Deputy. The approval from the NCSE will be for one additional year only i.e. 2018/2019 school year.

The continuation of the class is intended to allow for further consideration and assessment of the educational provision in this setting. To this end, the Inspectorate of my Department is currently undertaking this review.

Particular focus of my Inspectorate will be to examine the appropriateness of the operation of an early intervention ASD specific special class within this pre-school environment and to address concerns in relation to access to the opportunity for transition planning to primary placements.

Services for People with Disabilities

162. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount the multi-sensory unit cost which was recently put into a unit (details supplied). [19925/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of approving grant for the provision of a multi-sensory room at the facility referred to by the Deputy.

School Accommodation Provision

163. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision will be made in relation to an application for an additional classroom by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19929/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of application from the school referred to for the provision of additional classroom accommodation. The application is currently under consideration and my Department will be in direct contact with the school authorities when the assessment process

has concluded.

Third Level Fees

164. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if third level students from Northern Ireland studying here will be exempt from paying non-EU student fees under the common travel area from 2019. [19940/18]

165. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if third level students from the Republic of Ireland that study in Northern Ireland will be exempt from paying non-EU student fees under the common travel area from 2019. [19941/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

My Department has been working closely with a number of organisations, and in particular with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), in Brexit planning for the higher education sector.

The HEA has published a Brexit issues paper and has held meetings with the HEIs to discuss ongoing planning and issues with them as the process develops. My Department will continue to engage in this important aspect of planning and research work, and during 2018 will maintain our extensive engagement with stakeholders across the sector, which has been fundamental to the Department's preparations for Brexit since late 2016.

Following the UK triggering Article 50 of the Treaty in March 2017 and the ongoing negotiations, my Department has confirmed that eligible UK students who enrol for eligible courses for the 2018/19 academic year in a third level college recognised for the purposes of free fees will be able to avail of the Department's Free Fee Schemes.

Arrangements for an intake of such students for subsequent years will be kept under review in the context of the Brexit negotiations.

Irish students enrolling to study in other EU jurisdictions are subject to the fee structures and requirements for each individual host country.

Brexit Issues

166. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to protect Irish citizens' rights to study in a university or college on the island of Ireland and to ensure that students are not unduly punished financially as a result of Britain's decision to leave the European Union. [19942/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following the UK triggering Article 50 of the Treaty in March 2017 and the ongoing negotiations one of our principal concerns relates to protecting to the greatest extent possible student mobility between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the UK and within the EU and to support our strategy to increase non-EU student flows. Key to the ongoing access of our students to higher education on the island will be the maintenance of the common travel area, and the consequent continuity of fee status and supports for students, in both jurisdictions.

For Irish students wishing to study in Northern Ireland in the 2018/19 academic year I understand that there will not be any changes to their tuition fee status. Student Finance Northern

Ireland has also advised that all eligible full-time higher education students, including Irish students, entering higher education in Northern Ireland can get a Student Loan for Tuition Fees.

My Department has confirmed no change in fee status for students domiciled in Northern Ireland who enrol for courses for the 2018/19 academic year in a third level college in Ireland, with no change either in eligibility conditions for the Department's Free Fee Schemes. Comparable arrangements for an intake of such students for subsequent years will be kept under review in the context of the Brexit negotiations.

School Accommodation Provision

167. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for additional school accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19953/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of application from the school referred to for the provision of additional classroom. The application is currently under consideration and my Department will be in direct contact with the school authorities when the assessment process has concluded.

Schools Data

168. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in a location (details supplied) that are still using prefabricated buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20012/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold details relating to the information requested.

As the Deputy will be aware, it is my intention to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established, over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme (2016 to 2021). To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

It is intended that this assessment when finalised will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019. A funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 for this initiative in the programme.

School Accommodation

169. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of requests for classroom extensions and or sports halls for schools at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20013/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received applications for additional accommodation from two schools in County Carlow, one from a Primary school and one from a Post-Primary School.

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The application from the Primary school will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

In relation to the Post-Primary School, I wish to advise the Deputy, that a building project for this school is included in my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme (2019-2021).

The current status of all building projects, may be viewed on my Department's website *www.education.ie* – Schools & Colleges - Building Works.

Autism Support Services

170. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the post-primary school for 600 pupils in the Dublin 2 and 4 areas will have a dedicated autism unit. [20022/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is general practice to include a Special Needs Unit in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required.

School Transport Data

171. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of each contract for school bus provision by the length of the journey, number of children and cost of the route by each of the school bus routes in counties Donegal, Cork, Galway and Mayo without identifying the bus operator in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20029/18]

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

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

I have asked Bus Éireann to reply directly to the Deputy with the detailed information requested.

School Curriculum

172. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the controls his Department exercises in regard to outside groups that are invited by schools to help in delivering various aspects of the curriculum. [20036/18]

173. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has a memorandum of understanding with national organisations including, but not limited to, national sporting organisations or other outside organisations governing their participation within schools in helping deliver parts of curricula. [20037/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Ques-

tions Nos. 172 and 173 together.

It is the responsibility of each individual school to select the materials and resources that it will use to support its implementation of any part of the curriculum including SPHE or PE. Where an outside organisation is engaged by a school, they should be engaged in the context of delivering a planned and comprehensive programme in the school. They must not be brought in to replace the schools delivery of the curriculum but to enhance it. Interventions and external inputs should be evaluated by the school principal and teachers in terms of the content, approach, methodology and proposed learning outcomes.

National and international research has consistently shown that the classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with pupils and that s/he can have a powerful impact on influencing pupils' attitudes, values and behaviour in all aspects of health education in the school setting.

Every school is required to adhere to the Department's 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools' and must ensure that it meets any Garda vetting obligations that arise in respect of persons who work with pupils in the school. My Department provides guidelines to schools on the use of external providers for SPHE in particular. The guidelines were issued to schools in circulars 0022/2010 and circular 0023/2010 for primary and post-primary schools respectively.

In the context of the work my Department is undertaking to develop a Wellbeing Policy Statement for Schools, the guidelines to schools will be revised to provide more comprehensive and strengthened guidance to schools on the effective use of external programmes and facilitators relating to all aspects of Wellbeing.

Teacher Training Places

174. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if adequate plans will be provided for the forthcoming academic year for young students (details supplied) who wish to undertake courses in primary school teaching, and in particular students who had the required minimum points to pursue these courses in 2017 to 2018 but were denied the opportunity due to a lack of places being provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20073/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are 1,000 places available on the Bachelor of Education programme scheduled to commence in September 2018. The places are split between the four Higher Education Institutes who provide the course:

- Marino Institute of Education
- Mary Immaculate College
- DCU Institute of Education
- Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University

Applications for the Bachelor of Education programmes are made through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Upon receipt of an application, the CAO provides the student with a randomly generated number, this number only becomes relevant in the event of a tie of points.

The Higher Education Institutions advise the CAO of the number of places available on a particular course. The places are allocated to the students with the highest points. A situation may arise where there are a number of applicants with the same points competing for a few re-

maintaining places. The CAO allocates the remaining places to applicants based on their randomly generated number which was provided upon application. The procedure is that the applicants with the highest random numbers are offered the remaining places available and the other applicants are placed at the top of the waiting list.

Details of the random selection system are available on the website of the Central Applications Office.

I have established a Teacher Supply Steering Group which will develop a strategy on teacher supply for coming years to help ensure that there is a sufficient number of teachers available to meet the needs of primary and post primary schools. The Group will consider the issues that impact on teacher supply, including: policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply; promotion of the teaching profession; initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; and data/research requirements. The Group will also be looking at the numbers of students entering initial teacher education programmes.

Apprenticeship Data

175. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated average and full year cost per apprentice over a calendar year in State-funded craft and consortia led apprenticeships based on the latest data and participation levels. [20096/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): It is estimated that the cost of training an apprentice in one of the existing craft apprenticeships is approximately €6,700 per annum and the cost of training an apprentice in one of the new consortia led apprenticeships is approximately €5,100 per annum. The estimated annual cost of new consortia led apprenticeships may be subject to further refinement as greater numbers of these new programmes become operational.

Schools Building Projects Status

176. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of contractors which have expressed an interest in the construction of a school (details supplied) by the closing date of 3 May 2018; when tenders will be invited for the project; the length of time the tender process will take; when construction will commence on the new school as indicated in the departmental letter to the school in March 2018, which set out the timeframe for the progression of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20144/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2(b) submission has been reviewed by my Department and a letter issued to the school and its Design Team advising them of a timeframe for the progression of this project. This project has been authorised to commence the Pre-Qualification of Contractors.

The pre-qualification and shortlisting of suitable contractors normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

Thereafter a the tender process for the awarding of a construction contract for a school building project takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

177. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 86 of 22 March 2018, if the project brief is finalised in respect of the school; if so, the details of same; when a design team will be appointed for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20145/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the project brief for the school in question has been finalised and the schedules of accommodation have been issued to the Patron. My Department will be in further contact with the school authority in due course relating to the appointment of a Design Team.

School Staff

178. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the process will commence for the appointment of a principal for a school (details supplied) in view of the need to appoint the principal by 1 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20147/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of the Major School Building Projects announcement in November 2015 by my Department and in view of the continued support for an independent Gaelcholáiste, it was confirmed that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019.

Department approval is given for the appointment of a school Principal from 1 September of the school year prior to the opening of a new school.

The recruitment and appointment of teachers, including Principals, to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

School Placement

179. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a child (details supplied) who has not been able to secure a place in second level school for the past two years will be examined. [20152/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled students with special educational needs, including those with Autism, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special class and special school placements.

This network includes 130 ASD early intervention classes, 635 primary ASD classes and 277 post-primary ASD classes in mainstream schools and 125 Special School of which 20 are

ASD special schools.

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local SENO who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of this Department.

The NCSE works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

I understand from my officials that the parents of the child referred to by the Deputy are seeking a mainstream placement for their child and that a Section 29 appeal has been taken. A decision on this appeal is expected shortly. In the interim, home tuition has been sanctioned for the child.

Summer Works Scheme Data

180. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provision that has been made to budget for new applications to the school summer works scheme during 2018; if his attention has been drawn to concerns that there are no funds allocated for new applications for summer works; the number of applications for refurbishment that are outstanding by school; the cost of these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2016/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Summer Works Scheme is designed to allow schools to carry out small and medium scale building works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings. This scheme is additional to other capital

funding schemes that are operated by the Department such as the additional accommodation scheme, Emergency Works scheme i.e. for projects of such urgency that they would prevent some or all of the school from opening, and Minor Works schemes.

The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is a multi-annual Scheme. Over 1,650 schools, nearly 50% of schools, applied for inclusion under the current round of the scheme which reflects a very high demand.

Over 700 applications in Categories 7-10, at a cost of just over €52 million have not been reached to date. However, almost €80 million has been approved under the current round of the Scheme, in respect of 635 school projects, 464 primary and 171 post-primary schools, for Gas, electrical upgrades, mechanical, sanitation and roof improvement works.. Details of the successful school applicants, are published on the Department's website www.education.ie .

In relation to the Summer Works Scheme 2018, over €25 million will be spent on summer works projects in 2018. This expenditure will enable the remaining approved improvement works for 178 schools nationwide to be completed. These works will be carried out by the schools themselves on a devolved basis mainly over the summer months, so the disruption to students, teachers and other school staff will be kept to a minimum.

Furthermore, the Department intends to engage with the relevant education partners in relation to giving schools a better lead-in period for planning and delivering projects under the summer works scheme from 2019 onwards. While the Summer Works Scheme is hugely successful in enabling small scale refurbishment works to be done on a devolved basis, the Department considers that the operation of the scheme could be improved by providing a better lead-in period for schools rather than in Quarter 2 as in previous years. This will also help ensure that works done under the Summer Works Scheme fit better with any wider refurbishment/energy retrofit plans that may be done at schools under the increased funding provided in the National Development Plan. The engagement with education partners will commence shortly and will assist in developing a better timeline for the planning and delivery of summer works projects for 2019 onwards.

School Transport

181. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the Minister of State in his Department who has responsibility for the school bus transport system; and the designated orders that have been made to reflect that allocation of ministerial responsibility. [20172/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): John Halligan T.D. was appointed as Minister of State with responsibility for Training, Skills, Innovation and Research and Development on the 14th June, 2017.

A delegation order, S.I. No. 333/2017 - Education and Skills (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 - John Halligan, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, was made on the 18th July 2017 and is in the following link. Minister of State Halligan's portfolio includes school transport and this is reflected in the Delegation Order.

[debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/5C8B3086A778F04C802582870062C80F/\$File/PQ%20181%20080518.pdf?openelement">S.I. No 333/2017]

Schools Building Projects Status

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182. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school building (details supplied) in County Kildare; if the site is now in the ownership of his Department; and when construction will commence. [20173/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

My Department recently completed the review of the Stage 2b submission for this project and comments have issued. Each member of the design team has been requested to submit written confirmations that they have completed a final review and are satisfied that the tender documentation is fully compliant with the Department's Technical Guidance Documents, Building Control (Amendment) regulations and new Public Works Contract (PWC) tender documentation requirements.

Upon receipt of the requested confirmations and providing no other issues arise it is currently projected that this project will then be authorised to complete pre-qualification of contractors. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

Regarding the site, my Department is currently progressing the conveyancing process in consultation with the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

At this point it is not anticipated that the completion of conveyancing will impact upon the timelines for the delivery of the building project.

Visa Applications

183. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the religious volunteer visa programme; the changes that may have been made to the programme; the changes that may be made to the programme in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19887/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that Religious bodies may participate in the Volunteering in Ireland scheme which is open to all non-EEA nationals. The scheme was temporarily suspended at the end of 2017, pending the introduction of a new pre-clearance procedure. The new scheme, Volunteering in Ireland, became operational on the 30 April 2018.

The new pre-clearance procedure applies to both visa and non-visa required nationals who are seeking to remain in Ireland for periods greater than 90 days as a volunteer. Prior to arrival in the State, applicants must have applied for, and been granted, pre-clearance approval by INIS. The criteria for obtaining this permission are outlined in the policy document for the scheme, available on the INIS website.

As outlined in the policy document, the Volunteering in Ireland scheme will be reviewed after three years of operation.

Criminal Law

184. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to

commence the review of the legal protection offered to complainants in sexual assault cases announced in April 2018; and if an opportunity for persons and families affected by sexual assault and rape to provide an input into the review will be ensured. [19627/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Victims have an important voice in any consideration of the judicial process, and this is particularly the case with vulnerable victims like children and those who have experienced sexual violence. I am very conscious that the judicial process should not be a source of further trauma to anyone involved, with respect to both the rights of victims and accused persons.

Much work has already been done to protect complainants in sexual offence cases from any additional trauma arising from the criminal process. An Garda Síochána have begun a programme of establishing Divisional Protective Services Offices with specially trained staff to investigate these difficult crimes. The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 has also significantly enhanced protections for victims of crime, including victims of sexual offences. The Deputy will also be aware that complainants in sexual offence cases can currently access legal advice in certain limited circumstances. This is given effect through the Legal Aid Board which provides a legal advice service free of charge to complainants in prosecutions for certain rape and sexual assault cases. A person seeking this service is not required to undergo a means test or to pay a financial contribution. A legal aid service is also provided in certain rape and sexual assault cases where the complainant's prior sexual experience has been raised by the defence in the course of the trial. In these instances the Legal Aid Board will appoint a solicitor and a barrister to represent the complainant when the issue of previous sexual history is being raised and this service is also available without a means test.

Since announcing my plans for a review of the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences, I have been conducting a series of consultations with key stakeholders representing those affected by rape and sexual assault, including the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, the Rape Crisis Network Ireland, Women's Aid, the National Women's Council of Ireland and One in Four. I invited these bodies to share with me their views of the current protections in place for victims, and where they have identified a need for further supports, including what, if any, further legal supports may be needed. The information they have shared with me is being collated in my Department and will inform the development of the Terms of Reference for the review, which I intend to finalise shortly.

Youth Justice Strategy

185. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda youth diversion projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19638/18]

186. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda youth diversion projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19639/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department is obliged to carry out a call for proposals process during 2018 in relation to the provision of Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) services, to fully comply with requirements related to the co-funding of projects by the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

To ensure State-wide coverage of GYDP services for young people (which does not exist at present), the intention is that, in general, service provision will be aligned with Garda Divisions or other appropriate local areas with a distinct community identity as may be agreed during a wide ranging consultation process which is currently ongoing. Issues of community identity and numbers of potential participants on GYDPs in the area will be key considerations here.

The provision of GYDP services in all parts of the State has obvious advantages, particularly in terms of providing services for significant numbers of young people who cannot currently access them. In this regard, an independent evaluation report of the operation of an integrated approach to delivery of GYDP services within County Kerry, commissioned by my Department is expected to be finalised shortly. This report will help with the further development of GYDP services in the context of the Call for Proposals.

GYDPs deliver valuable services for young people who have committed a crime or may be at risk of offending as well as providing important support for An Garda Síochána at local level. I can assure the Deputy that in the context of the Call for Proposals my Department is committed to ensuring continuity of service for participants on GYDPs and maintain a community driven approach to their operation, as well as minimising any disruption for workers and service providers. In this regard, and in line with the overall objective of providing GYDP services to all children and young persons who require them, I am advised that the Call for Proposals will require applicants to provide for continuity of GYDP services for young people currently participating in the service. Furthermore, the Call for Proposals process will facilitate existing service providers forming consortiums, which could apply to provide services under the new comprehensive approach that is being developed.

GYDPs provide an effective and essential support to the operation of the statutory Garda Diversion Programme by An Garda Síochána. The principal focus of GYDPs is on young people who receive a Garda caution under the Diversion Programme for involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour and are referred to a local GYDP (primary referrals). GYDPs also accommodate a certain proportion of young people who are considered to be at risk of involvement in offending or anti-social behaviour (secondary referrals).

In relation to secondary referrals, it has to be considered if, in principle, it is appropriate to refer a child to a Garda project where no criminal act has been identified. For some, a better option might be referral to available mainstream youth services that could appropriately support them. That being said, it is accepted that referrals to GYDPs must take account of local needs and issues in relation to access and availability of mainstream youth services. Following the Call for Proposals process, GYDP services will still accommodate a certain proportion of secondary referrals and the proportion of these may vary from area to area depending on identified local needs.

My Department is very much aware of the range of concerns expressed in relation to the Call for Proposals process. I can assure the Deputy that careful consideration is being given to all issues raised by stakeholders involved in GYDPs, including those of independent service providers, as part of the extensive consultation process which is currently ongoing. This process includes arrangements for an extensive series of meetings with community based organisations and project workers which will facilitate closer communication and exchange of information in relation to these matters. In addition, the consultations will include arrangements to hear the views of young people, including participants or former participants on GYDPs.

I can assure the Deputy that the new approach to GYDP provision which is being developed in preparation for the Call for Proposals will not reduce the level of service that already exists, or the importance of community involvement in its delivery. On the contrary, the intention is

to build on, update and improve a very valuable service so that it is available to every child or young person in the country who requires it. This improvement to the service will have benefits for significant numbers of young people in the State who cannot currently access GYDP services. While certain aspects of the new service model have been determined, work is ongoing to complete the full details to be included in the Call for Proposals, which is expected to issue in the second quarter of this year. I am convinced that community ownership and participation of the projects is an essential dimension that must be preserved and strengthened in the working out of this process.

Proposed Legislation

187. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19671/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The General Scheme of a Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) (Amendment) Bill 2018 was approved by the Government on 6 March 2018. The General Scheme has been published on my Department's website. The Bill has now been referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting. The General Scheme has also been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality to undergo pre-legislative scrutiny.

When drafted, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) (Amendment) Bill 2018 will provide for sentencing for repeat sex offenders. The Bill will take on board proposals made in the Criminal Justice (Commission of Sexual Offences)(Amendment) Bill 2017 which was brought forward by Minister Kevin Boxer Moran while a Private Member. In July 2017 the Government agreed to develop its own Bill based on the provisions of Minister Moran's Bill. The Bill will also contain sentencing provisions for the offence of incest.

Commencement of Legislation

188. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the sections of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 that have been commenced; if there are sections which have yet to be commenced; if so, when these sections will be commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19677/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015.

New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health), must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act can be commenced. A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service (DSS) and this work is ongoing.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016), brought some provisions of Part 1 (Preliminary and General) and Part 9 (Director of the Decision Support Service) of the Act into operation on 17

October 2016. These provisions were brought into operation in order to progress the setting up of the DSS and to enable the process of recruitment of the Director of the DSS to begin. Ms Áine Flynn was appointed Director of the Decision Support Service on 2 October 2017.

The key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group to allow for further commencement orders for the provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the DSS is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options. The Director is also working in a very determined way to get the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations in place in order that the Decision Support Service can be up and running as quickly as possible. There are many complex strands to this work, including involvement of multiple organisations, and the prevailing view is that the Decision Support Service will not be ready to become operational until 2019.

While it is not possible at the moment to provide an exact timeframe for the full commencement of the 2015 Act, every effort is underway to ensure that the Decision Support Service has all necessary capacity to open for business as soon as possible.

The 2018 Budget provides for an allocation of €3 million in the Justice and Equality Vote for the establishment of the Decision Support Service.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides for a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

Courts Service

189. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if court sittings will be held in Waterford Courthouse on a consistent basis five days a week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19698/18]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the District Court in Waterford will continue to sit five days a week from Monday to Friday as per the Schedule in S.I. 23 of 2009. The Courts Service has advised that there are currently no plans to change these scheduled sittings or to amend the Statutory Instrument.

The Courts Service has further advised that the Circuit Court sits in Waterford every week and that there are also no plans to change or amend these sittings.

Immigration Controls

190. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons of Syrian, Eritrean, Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian, Libyan and Somalian origin refused leave to land at points of entry here in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19700/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Dep-

uty that it has not been possible in the time available to provide the details requested. I have requested An Garda Síochána to compile the necessary information and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Immigration Controls

191. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons of Syrian, Eritrean, Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian, Libyan and Somalian origin refused leave to land at points of entry here to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19701/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that it has not been possible in the time available to provide the details requested. I have requested An Garda Síochána to compile the necessary information and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Asylum Applications Data

192. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that are in the asylum process for more than three, five and seven years, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19702/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is important to note that a very small proportion of applicants in the system for three or more years are awaiting a first instance decision on their refugee status. They will have had a negative first instance decision which determines that they have not demonstrated that they are in need of international protection. If they remain as applicants for the years in question, they are likely to be exercising their right to appeal either to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal or to the Courts for Judicial Review. Applications remain live on the system while the Courts determine the cases presented.

On 31 December 2016, the International Protection Act 2015 (IPA 2015) was commenced, providing for the introduction of a single application procedure for people seeking international protection in the State. The 2015 Act replaces the previous sequential application system with a single application process, for asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain in the State, bringing Ireland into line with the processing arrangements applicable in other EU Member States. However, the Act also contained transitional arrangements which has put further pressures on processing. The main challenge now faced is the need to quickly process the substantial number of cases on hand many of which were carried over from the previous system.

As of 27 April 2018, there are a total of 5,300 applications for international protection pending in the IPO. Some 2,200 applications were made before the commencement of the 2015 Act but were not finalised by the former Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) by that date. These applications reverted to be processed by the IPO under the transitional provisions of the 2015 Act. Notwithstanding the increased caseload arising from the transitional arrangements, over 87% of applications are in the system for less than 3 years. This is a major improvement from the situation when the McMahon Working Group reported on the matter in June 2015.

The challenge of clearing this additional caseload is being addressed by deploying increased resources and a continued review of efficiency and effective use of those resources, having

due regard to the requirements of the 2015 Act, in order to maximise quality output, produce impartial decisions and ensure value for money for the taxpayer. In this regard, it is planned to increase the strength of the IPO Processing Panel over the coming months following public advertisement and interview.

The following Table provides a breakdown of the numbers of applicants 3 years and more being dealt with by the International Protection Office (IPO) and the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT). It is of note that approximately 40% of the applicants in the IPO figures were returned from the RAT under the transition arrangements under the Act. In addition, over 80 cases included in the overall figures in the table are the subject of Judicial Reviews, usually instigated by the applicants.

Timescale since first application	No. cases in the IPO	No. cases in the IPAT
3 years - 5 years	447	176
5 years - 7 years	17	9
7 years or more	51	23

Sexual Offences Data

193. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of convicted sex offenders in prison here; the number of these that are for child sex offences; the number of convicted sex offenders that have completed their sentences; the number of these that were for child sex offences and are subject to reporting requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19735/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that there were 375 prisoners in custody under sentence for offences of sexual nature on 3 May 2018.

The Irish Prison Service does not receive age profile information on the victims of sex offenders therefore it is not possible to provide the information in the format requested by the Deputy. The Courts Service and An Garda Síochána have also confirmed that they do not collate offence data in the format requested.

Sex Offenders Notification Requirements

194. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a monitoring of international travel by sex offenders convicted in courts here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19736/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Convicted sex offenders are subject to monitoring and supervision in the community through the Garda Síochána and the Probation Service. The Sex Offenders Act 2001 provides for the monitoring of convicted sex offenders in the community. Under the 2001 Act a person who has been convicted of a sexual offence must notify the Garda Síochána of their name and address within seven days. The 2001 Act also provides for sex offenders orders where the court can prohibit a convicted sex offender from doing things with a view to protecting the public from harm.

Under section 10(3) of the Sex Offenders Act 2001, if a registered sex offender intends to leave the State for a continuous period of 7 days or more, he must notify the Garda Síochána of that intention and, if known, the address of the place outside the State he intends to reside

or stay. This provision allows for the relevant authorities in their country of destination to be notified of the details of travel, and enables the ongoing monitoring of the individual in that jurisdiction.

I also intend to bring to Government shortly the General Scheme of a Sex Offenders (Amendment) Bill which will strengthen the monitoring of sex offenders in the community, including reducing the notification period from seven to three days.

The Joint Committee on Justice and Equality will examine the question of restrictions on travel for convicted sex offenders, following the referral by the Oireachtas of a Private Members Bill, the Sex Offenders (Amendment) Bill 2018, which makes proposals in this regard.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

195. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department or a State agency under his remit have availed of the services of companies (details supplied) since 2011; if so, the details of the expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19821/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed that, based on a review of the Department's central financial management system, payments were made to the latter of the companies referenced to the value of €13,272.90 by the Department and its agencies in the period 2011 to 2013 inclusive. The payments mainly related to services for the disposal of ICT equipment under the EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. There were no payments made to this service provider in subsequent years.

Citizenship Ceremonies

196. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the waiting times for citizenship ceremonies; and the reason for the long delays. [19752/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union as well as international level. It is therefore important that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that the integrity of the regime for granting Irish citizenship through the naturalisation process is held in high regard both at home and internationally.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While the Citizenship Division endeavours that most straightforward cases are processed to a decision within six months, this has to be seen in the context of the work involved in dealing with volumes of applications, some of which can be very complex in nature, and the need to ensure that each applicant fulfils the statutory conditions for naturalisation. The nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases can take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks may take a considerable period of time.

Processing timescales can often be impacted due to further documentation being required from the applicant, or payment of the required certificate fee is awaited, or the applicant has not been engaging with the office. In some instances delays can arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example, where additional information comes to light which requires to

be considered. In other instances the applicant themselves may request that a hold be put on their application, for example, where they may have returned to their country of origin for a prolonged period, to facilitate them in making arrangements to return to reside in the State, or where they have difficulty in obtaining satisfactory evidence of their identity or nationality.

The final stage requires the applicant to attend at a citizenship ceremony. Citizenship ceremony days take place periodically throughout the year, at which up to 3,500 candidates for citizenship make their declaration of fidelity to the Irish nation and loyalty to the State, give an undertaking to uphold the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values and receive their certificate of naturalisation. The organisation of a citizen ceremony day involving over 3,500 applicants, together with their family and friends, is a significant logistical exercise usually taking a number of months to organise. The next citizenship ceremony day will take place on 21 May 2018; persons in respect of whom the Minister has indicated an intention to grant a certificate of naturalisation are in the process of being invited to attend. A very small number of persons whose applications were only approved in the very recent past cannot be accommodated at this ceremony and will be invited to attend the next ceremony.

INIS devotes a considerable amount of its overall resources to the processing of these cases. It also operates a dedicated phone helpline and email helpdesk available for all applicants interested in the progress of their application, details of which are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie

Residency Permits

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for permission to remain in the State on the basis of parentage of an Irish citizen child in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19891/18]

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 applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child. The application was received in the relevant section of INIS on 20 February, 2018. The application is under consideration at present and INIS will be in contact with the person concerned in due course.

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.

Prison Service Staff

198. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if it is envisaged that transfers from the Irish Prison Service to other areas of his Department will cease upon the new reorganisation of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19903/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Plans to establish the Irish Prison Service (IPS) as a scheduled office that will also incorporate administrative staff

currently employed in my Department are well advanced. Under these arrangements departmental staff in Longford will transfer to the IPS under a transfer of function while staff undertaking IPS duties in Dublin will have the option of being reassigned to other divisions of my Department based in Dublin.

Thereafter, any officers within my Department or the Irish Prison Service would have to progress transfer requests through established transfer mechanisms. However, as the Deputy may be aware, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is developing a central mobility portal which will link all Government Departments to one centralised transfer database, where staff can enter and update their transfer request/s.

As the Deputy will be aware an external expert group, known as the Effectiveness and Renewal Group (ERG), is currently examining the operation of my Department and is expected to deliver a first report to the Government by the end of June. In tandem, work is being taken forward in relation to the structure of the Department. Decisions in relation to any reorganisation of my Department will be taken after consideration of the ERG report.

Prison Service Staff

199. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prison staff that have transferred on a full time transfer from other locations within the Irish Prison Service in the grade of prison officer to a location (details supplied) using a monthly or quarterly transfer report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20017/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Prison Service that the assignment of all staff across the prison estate is done having due regard to the exigencies of the service as a whole and in a way that ensures the optimum allocation of resources. In the main, the Irish Prison Service endeavours to assign Prison Officers through a voluntary transfer process, which is predicated on seniority of service within the grade.

The Irish Prison Service have further advised me that the total number of prison officers who transferred into Portlaoise Prison between 8th of July 2013 and 15th December 2017 with a pay number greater than 17/6418 is 20.

Family Reunification Applications

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of applications for family reunification in the case of the relatives of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20020/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the particular applications referred to were refused on 21 December 2017. Appeals were submitted on the 21 February 2018 and further supporting documentation was received as recently as 17 April 2018. The appeals will be finalised as soon as possible.

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.

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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 INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

Departmental Contingency Planning

201. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funds set aside on an annual basis for contingent liability for the past ten years to date in 2018; the way in which it is determined the amount that is forecast to be needed for contingent liability; if he carries out an actuary analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability; if he conducts a risk assessment in the context of contingent liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20064/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that as my Department, along with all other Government Departments, prepares accounts on a cash as opposed to an accruals basis, the issue of contingencies or contingent liabilities does not arise. Where it is envisaged that there may be a future requirement for additional funding to meet an emerging need, representations are made to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the estimates process.

Deportation Orders

202. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) is still waiting for a decision on their application for leave to remain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20115/18]

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 is the subject of a deportation order, made on 10 April 2015, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of their asylum claim and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The person concerned, through their legal representative, has made a request to have that deportation order revoked, based on the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order.

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

203. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person

(details supplied) has been granted temporary leave to remain in the State with biennial renewal since 2011; the reason their travel documents were not renewed when they expired in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20116/18]

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 has a current right of residency in the State, on stamp 4 conditions, up to 13th July, 2019. It will be open to the person concerned to apply to their local Immigration Registration Office to have that permission further renewed two months in advance of their current permission expiring. In that context, the person concerned will be required to make an on-line registration appointment at the relevant time. It will also be open to the person concerned to apply to the Citizenship Division of my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation when, in their view, they meet the eligibility criteria applicable to such applications. Details of the citizenship application process can be found on the INIS Website – *www.inis.gov.ie*

Against this background, I am satisfied that there are no issues outstanding as regards the residency position in the State of the person concerned.

I am further advised that the person is not entitled to a Travel Document under the International Protection Act 2015.

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.

Court Accommodation Provision

204. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 100 of 22 March 2018, when the promised review of the future delivery of court services in the District Court area of Kilcock will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20146/18]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has advised that it is currently concentrating on the development or refurbishment of courthouses at a number of provincial city/county town venues. As part of a major Public Private Partnership initiative, new courthouses have been delivered at Drogheda, Letterkenny, Wexford, Limerick and Waterford since June 2017 with a further 2 projects to be delivered at Cork and Mullingar in the coming weeks and months.

The Courts Service has further advised that on completion of this major programme of work there are 5 provincial city/county town venues still in need of major investment in court facilities, these being Tralee, Galway, Wicklow, Portlaoise and Roscommon. The Courts Service has confirmed that collectively these cities and towns will be the next priority for investment in courthouse facilities outside of the capital under the Courts Service provincial capital building programme. The Courts Service is also considering the development of Courts facilities in other

smaller locations.

The Courts Service has informed me that Kilcock Courthouse in north County Kildare was closed in July 2016 on health and safety grounds and that District Court sittings were transferred to Naas. The Courts Service has also informed me that it plans to review the future delivery of court services in the District Court area of Kilcock in the near future and that this will include a local consultation process. No date has yet been fixed for the commencement of the review.

Garda Transport Provision

205. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that almost 50% of the fleet in the Garda R District is either aged over ten years or has almost 300,000 kilometres on the vehicles; if extra vehicles will be allocated to this district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20155/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet and this is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total, in the period 2013 to 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I understand that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 24 vehicles attached to the Garda R District. Of these 24 vehicles, a total of 10 vehicles, or just under 42%, are aged 10 years or older. I am further informed by the Garda authorities that there are no vehicles in the district in question with 300,000 kilometres on the clock and that those vehicles close to this figure are included in the number of vehicles that are aged 10 years or older.

I understand that An Garda Síochána operate a comprehensive service repair and maintenance programme to ensure that all vehicles in the fleet are operating to manufacturers specifications. All vehicles are operated up to the manufacturers durability limits (which is generally 300,000km) or uneconomic repair irrespective of age.

Finally, I am informed that a further 28 vehicles are due to be allocated to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) this year on a prioritised basis as determined by the Assistant Commissioner DMR.

Prison Service Staff

206. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 194 of 1 May 2018, when a person (details supplied) can expect to be called for their appeal hearing with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal. [20208/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be

aware, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted on Prison Officers. Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in considering applications made under the Scheme. However, to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made of the Tribunal.

Appeal hearings are planned in chronological order by the date the appeal was lodged and are heard by three Tribunal members. I understand that the Tribunal secretariat is currently scheduling appeal hearings up to the summer period and that the Tribunal will write to applicants and/or their legal representatives when the dates for further appeal hearings are set.

Job Creation Targets

207. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual targets for attaining 70,000 returned emigrants as per the A Programme for A Partnership Government commitment in tabular form; and the progress to date. [19617/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's goal is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin, and to attract back at least 70,000 emigrants. The whole of Government effort to deliver on these objectives is supported by the annual Action Plan for Jobs.

The CSO estimates that between April 2016 and April 2017, 27,400 Irish emigrants returned to Ireland. As the economy continues to grow and the economy approaches full employment, this trend is likely to continue.

Since the first Action Plan for Jobs was launched in early 2012, there are almost 346,000 more people at work bringing total employment in the State to 2,225,100 (as of Q4 2017). My Department and its agencies have a range of initiatives to connect with Irish emigrants (and others) to outline the careers and entrepreneurial opportunities in Ireland. These include:

- IDA Ireland actively promotes Ireland as a location for new investment and Enterprise Ireland has specific targets to attract entrepreneurs to Ireland with a focused marketing programme underway in international markets.

- Since 2016, my Department has funded TechLife Ireland- a partnership with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Irish Technology industry - to promote and brand Ireland as a top destination to pursue a career in technology and attract top tech professionals to Ireland. Industry is playing an important role in supporting the initiative and driving its development.

- Science Foundation Ireland encourages leading researchers to move to Ireland raising Ireland's profile as a location for research excellence and career advancement. For instance, SFI awards two Saint Patrick's Day Science Medals to distinguished Irish scientists, engineers or technology leaders living and working in the USA: one academic and one from industry.

Finally, I would emphasise that ensuring a continued focus on attracting foreign direct investment and maintaining and improving competitiveness is critical to attracting talent back to Ireland.

Research and Development Supports

208. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which research and development expenditure has been afforded a sufficiently high prior-

ity in Departments since the launch of Innovation 2020 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19632/18]

213. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there is still a commitment to attain the Innovation 2020 research and development intensity target of 2.5% of GNP in view of recently published reports (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19631/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 and 213 together.

As part of a coordinated European response to the challenges for growth and jobs, Ireland, along with our EU colleagues, signed up to the Europe 2020 Strategy in 2011. Under Europe 2020, Ireland committed to raise gross (public and private) investment in Research and Development (R&D) to 2.5% of GNP by 2020. We reiterated this commitment in Innovation 2020, Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology.

The overarching vision in Innovation 2020 is for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader driving a strong sustainable economy and a better society – within this the focus is on excellence, talent and impact. Innovation 2020 commits all research funding government departments to ensure that R&D expenditure is afforded a sufficiently high priority.

As part of the whole of Government approach to Innovation 2020, an Implementation Group chaired by my Department and comprising representatives from key Government Departments, research funding agencies and the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government has been established and is tasked with driving delivery of the actions in Innovation 2020.

As committed to in Innovation 2020, the Implementation Group is to report annually to the Cabinet Committee on progress in achieving high-level targets and delivering on actions. Two progress reports have been published and are available on my Department's website, www.dbei.ie. Innovation 2020 comprises 139 actions (which includes headline actions and their sub-actions). The Second Progress report, reporting on actions taken in the period up to July 2017, was published in December 2017. It stated that 42 actions had been initiated, 67 actions were ongoing and 8 actions were complete. The third progress report is due to be brought to Cabinet in July 2018.

As three quarters of Ireland's gross expenditure on R&D is funded by enterprise, a very significant part of our policy has been to align public effort in a manner that leverages R&D activity in the enterprise sectors. While private spending on R&D slowed during the financial crisis, it has been increasing steadily since 2011. Direct public expenditure on R&D climbed from €719m in 2016 to an estimated €768m for 2017.

Notwithstanding that we have increased both public and private R&D spending in recent years, Ireland's R&D intensity rate (R&D budget as a percentage of GNP) was estimated at 1.52% of GNP for 2015 and 1.43% of GNP in 2016. The recent fall has been due, in part, to the increase in GNP, which was particularly strong in 2015 for one-off reasons. While Ireland has not yet reached its 2020 target, it is worth noting only 2 of the EU27 countries have reached their targets as per latest figures.

The CSO introduced a new indicator in July 2017 (modified GNI or GNI*) designed to exclude globalisation effects that disproportionately impact the measurement of the size of the Irish economy. When using GNI* as a complementary indicator, the R&D intensity rate is estimated at 1.72% for 2016.

A mid-term evaluation of Innovation 2020 will be undertaken this year. This will give us the

opportunity to review progress on the targets, goals and actions in Innovation 2020 so that we can identify any relevant adjustments in a timely manner to ensure successful delivery on the vision and objectives.

It is recognised that we will need to continue our drive to increase public and private investment in R&D if we are to realise our vision in Innovation 2020. I have emphasised that across Government there is a need to ensure that in discussions regarding financial allocations for future years, the importance of funding for R&D is kept to the fore.

Film Industry Promotion

209. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the conditions that surrounded the sale of the State's stake in a studio (details supplied); the way in which this fits into the strategy in respect of securing Ireland as an attractive location for film production into the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20043/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ardmore Studios Limited has been sold to Olcott Entertainment Limited. The Ardmore site is currently zoned for Film Industry use only, and this protection is due to run for at least 5 more years under the Bray Municipal District Local Area plan. The site cannot be used for non-Film Industry development without the agreement of Wicklow County Council to alter the current zoning restriction.

Enterprise Ireland negotiated the sale of its shareholding with the benefit of due diligence undertaken by independent consultants and are satisfied that they realised full market value, and on a par with the other parties.

Investment is required in the Ardmore studio's facilities to secure its long term commercial future and the Olcott Entertainment deal provides the potential to breathe new life into the company at a time when the market for film production in Ireland is again showing good growth potential.

I understand that Olcott plans to develop and expand the Ardmore Studio offering, and other related entertainment projects, and to retain the current experienced Ardmore management and staff.

The promoters of Olcott Entertainment have a strong track record in the film production industry. This acquisition will ensure Ardmore Studios continues to be a world class film studio, can strengthen the potential of Ireland as a location for film production and take advantage of new opportunities in emerging areas including on-demand TV, content and gaming production.

Overall, I am confident that the sale will not only continue to ensure high quality production of current projects, but will also provide continued investment in the studio, and employment opportunities for the skilled workers in the area.

Policy responsibility for the development of the film industry rests with my colleague, Ms Josepha Madigan, TD, Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for the Irish film, TV Drama and the animation industry. Its statutory remit is to assist and encourage the making of film in the State and the development of the industry in Ireland. In 2018, €18 million was allocated to the IFB, an increase of €1.55 million from the previous year.

The Film Board also supports the Irish screen industries at major international markets and festivals, promotes inward investment, the use of Ireland as a location for international production and provides support for companies filming in Ireland. The Board liaises with IDA Ireland and Tourism Ireland to maximise opportunities for the promotion of Ireland as a location for film productions. Information on its funding scheme is available on the Irish Film Board website at *www.irishfilmboard.ie*.

The Government also supports the film industry through the film tax relief scheme - Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The twin approach of direct funding and tax expenditure measures maximises the benefits of the Government's support to the audiovisual industry.

Unfair Dismissals

210. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the recourse available in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20045/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I understand that in the specific case referred to by the deputy, an unfair dismissal case was lodged with the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) in 2013. The case was subsequently heard on 24 October 2014 and the EAT determination issued to the parties on 20 November 2014.

I must advise the deputy however that once the determination of the Employment Appeals Tribunal issues, the Tribunal has no further function in the matter.

The mechanism for enforcing determinations of the Employment Appeals Tribunal generally involves an application to the Circuit Court for an order directing compliance, or instituting proceedings in the District Court.

As I understand it, the collection of any monies outstanding in respect of a Circuit Court order is the responsibility of the relevant County Sheriff.

Appointments to State Boards

211. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of plans to appoint two further directors to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board; and the criteria under consideration for their selection. [19628/18]

212. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a representative for small policy holders will be included on the Personal Injuries Assessment Board and in the future appointment of directors to the board. [19629/18]

215. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the process involved in appointing directors to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board; the person or body that recommends possible appointees; the skill set required for the position of director with the board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19814/18]

217. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there is scope to appoint directors to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board that have a background in consumer issues and affairs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19816/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 211, 212, 215 and 217 together.

The Board of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board is appointed by me as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003 and in compliance with the procedures outlined in the *'Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016)*. The Board consists of a Chairperson, the Chief Executive and nine ordinary members of which six are nominated by external bodies designated under legislation. The six external bodies are as follows:

- 2 persons nominated by ICTU
- 1 person nominated by Ibec
- 1 person nominated by the Irish Insurance Federation (IIF)
- 1 person nominated by the Central Bank
- 1 person nominated by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

In addition to the six statutory nominees outlined above, members are generally recruited to the Board through open advertisement on the State Boards portal www.stateboards.ie operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) who, since 2014, have been responsible for putting in place an open, accessible, rigorous and transparent system to support Ministers in making appointments to State Boards.

There are currently two vacancies on the Board with a third position becoming vacant in July 2018. One of these vacancies will be filled by seeking a nominee from Insurance Ireland (formerly the Irish Insurance Federation) as one of the nominating bodies under the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003.

The most recent advertisement on stateboards.ie seeks to recruit persons with medical and legal expertise for the other two Board positions. Candidates are sought on the basis of this expertise, rather than being representatives of either medical or legal bodies. Expertise in these areas is something the Board believes would be useful to its functioning and such skills have been available to the Board in the past. Other desirable criteria for the posts include: prior experience on a Board, Committee or Working Group at a senior level; knowledge of corporate governance and risk management; understanding of the public sector, in particular, accountability structures and reforms; as well as familiarity with claims assessment, the insurance industry and of personal injuries in particular.

Any individual who believes that they meet these criteria may apply and will be assessed in that regard.

As with all such advertisements, PAS advertise and manage the application process. When all applications are received, PAS will assemble an Assessment Panel to consider the applications and present a list of eligible candidates to the Department for onward transmission to me as Minister.

Corporate Governance standards require that Board Members act in good faith and in the best interests of the State body. The duty of Board Members is owed to the Agency and not to any specific stakeholder.

Question No. 213 answered with Question No. 208.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

214. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits since 2011 sponsored by IDA Ireland to Dublin that also visited Cork and to Cork that also visited Dublin, in the context of the agency's Horizon 2020 strategy; and if the target of 50% of investments to be located outside Dublin and Cork will be reached. [19705/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland's primary regional development goal, as set out in its current strategy 'Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019', is to increase investment by 30% to 40% in every region of Ireland. Real progress has been made towards that target over the first three years of this strategy with half of all jobs created by IDA client companies since 2015 located outside Dublin.

IDA Ireland collates data on the number of site visits to individual counties only. It does not, on account of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, release details of the specific itineraries of potential investors. Information on whether visits included both Cork and Dublin elements is therefore not available. I set out in the table, however, details of the annual number of site visits to Dublin and Cork from 2011 to Q1 2018.

Site visits to Dublin and Cork 2011 to Q1 2018

Year	Dublin	Cork
2011	150	27
2012	196	38
2013	180	31
2014	205	30
2015	242	48
2016	284	49
2017	327	51
Q1 2018	69	10

Question No. 215 answered with Question No. 211.

Appointments to State Boards Data

216. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the professional backgrounds of existing directors of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19815/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Board of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board is appointed by me as the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003 and in compliance with the procedures outlined in the 'Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016)'. The Board consists of a Chairperson, the Chief Executive and nine ordinary members of which six are nominated by external bodies designated under legislation. The six external bodies are as follows:

- 2 persons nominated by ICTU
- 1 person nominated by Ibec
- 1 person nominated by the Irish Insurance Federation (IIF)

- 1 person nominated by the Central Bank

- 1 person nominated by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

In addition to the six statutory nominees outlined above, members are generally recruited to the Board through open advertisement on the State Boards portal *www.stateboards.ie* operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) who, since 2014, have been responsible for putting in place an open, accessible, rigorous and transparent system to support Ministers in making appointments to State Boards.

The current members of the Board of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board are as follows:

Dermot Divilly, Non-Executive Chairperson – Businessman/Company Director

John Lynch, Vice Chairperson - Business Consultant, Company Director and Accountant

Conor O'Brien, Chief Executive of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB)

Colette Crowne, Deputy Director and nominee of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC)

Walter Cullen, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) nominee, former trade union official

Martin Naughton, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) nominee, and former Head of Finance and Administration in SIPTU, with a background in Change Management and Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare

Breda Power, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Margot Slattery, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (Ibec) nominee, Company Director

Tim O'Hanrahan, Senior Adviser to the Deputy Governor of Prudential Regulation and nominee of The Central Bank of Ireland

There are currently two vacancies on the Board.

Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 211.

Departmental Agencies Data

218. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a site (details supplied); the person or body that owns the site; if there have been site visits through IDA Ireland to the site; and her plans to sell the site in the future. [19922/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The site in question, which comprises approximately 54 acres of land at Carrigtowhill in County Cork, is owned by IDA Ireland. The Agency continues to actively market the site to potential investors.

IDA Ireland is engaging with Cork County Council and other key stakeholders to ensure the site is best placed to attract investment. The site presents an attractive option to potential investors and benefits from previous upgrades to infrastructure and utilities which could reduce the start up costs for any company locating there.

IDA Ireland collates data on site visits on a county-by-basis only so information is not available on visits to specific locations within a county. In 2017 there were 51 site visits to Cork and a further 10 in the first quarter of this year.

Third Level Funding

219. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on introducing a new five-year cycle with respect to the programme for research in third level institutions; the duration to the cycle in operation; when it expires; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20097/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLTI) was launched in 1998, with five cycles of expenditure to date. In addition to supporting the provision of top-class research infrastructure (buildings, laboratories and cutting-edge equipment), PRTLTI saw significant investment in human capital development, through Structured PhD/Emergent Technology programmes across Ireland's Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

The current Cycle of PRTLTI (Cycle 5) was announced in 2010 and has involved exchequer expenditure of approx. €277m with a further €59m of private investment. Cycle 5 projects have now been completed and my Department is addressing the remaining payments associated with these awards. The 2018 allocation to PRTLTI is €14.3m with a portion of this being used to part pay outstanding bills for PRTLTI Cycle 5 projects.

Innovation 2020, the Government's strategy for research and innovation, includes an action to scope out and develop a successor to PRTLTI to support new investment in research infrastructure, including buildings and equipment. It also contains an action to increase the enrolment of PhD and research masters students.

The scoping of a future cycle of PRTLTI has been undertaken by my Department, working with the Department of Education and Skills (DES). It will be noted that future cycles of PRTLTI are identified in the National Development Plan as an important component of the Innovation pillar.

Pending a Government decision on the timing and scale of a future cycle of PRTLTI, it is important to note that actions are already being taken by my Department, DES and other research funders to fund infrastructure and human capital in the area of research. My Department allocated an additional €5.5m in Budget 2018 to fund both PhDs and Research Masters and this additional funding has already been allocated by Science Foundation Ireland. It is envisaged that further additional funding will be provided in 2019 and subsequent years to build on the initial steps taken in 2018.

In this context, my Department recently launched a consultation on a proposed new Centres for Research Training (CRT) programme, to be funded through Science Foundation Ireland. This new programme is designed to deliver world-class, postgraduate research and training programmes with a focus on employability and sectoral and international mobility. It is proposed that SFI Centres for Research Training will provide sustainable programmes of research and training for cohorts of research Masters and PhD students commencing in 2019, with new cohorts of students enrolling in subsequent years. The cohort-based programme will deliver a world-class, student-focused postgraduate experience which will contribute to the goal of positioning Ireland as a leader in postgraduate researcher training and education.

In the area of research equipment and other infrastructure, Science Foundation Ireland has

issued a 2018 Call and is currently assessing proposals using international peer review. SFI has already funded more than €50m of research infrastructure across the high education system since the start of 2016.

The Department of Education and Skills also announced funding in the context of Budget 2018 to address the need for physical space for research in the higher education sector. This includes €200m for public private partnerships in the Institute of Technology sector and €257m for investment in the higher education sector generally, including for research. Significant additional investment in higher education infrastructure over the period to 2027 (in the region of €3 billion) is indicated in the NDP and this will address both education and research activities in the higher education institutions.

Pending a decision on a future cycle of PRTLI, the actions being taken by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills are addressing to a significant degree the requirements for increased investment in both physical infrastructure and human capital in higher education research as identified in Innovation 2020.

Departmental Funding

220. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of funding allocated to Enterprise Ireland, local enterprise offices, LEOs, InterTradeIreland and IDA Ireland, by capital and current allocations in each of the years from 2014 to 2018, in tabular form. [20098/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The distribution of Current and Capital allocations by my Department to Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, InterTrade Ireland and the IDA, in each of the years from 2014 to 2018, is set out in tabular form.

Enterprise Ireland

-	Current	Capital	Total
2014	€80.873m	€159.6m - plus €11m in capital carryover	€251.473m
2015	€83.722m	€163.43m - Plus €12m in capital carryover	€259.152m
2016	€79.887m	€173.6m	€253.487
2017	€84.502m	€185m	€269.502
2018	€87.998m	€185m	€272.998

IDA Ireland

-	Current	Capital	Total
2014	€38.607m	€89m - Plus €3m in capital carryover	€130.607
2015	€40.316m	€90m - Plus - €5m in capital carryover - Plus - €21m in Supplementary Estimate, December 2015	€156.316

-	Current	Capital	Total
2016	€41.68m	€112m - Plus €10m in capital carryover	€163.68
2017	€42.264m	€137m	€179.264
2018	€48.78m	€132m	€180.78

Inter-Trade Ireland

-	Current	Capital	Total
2014	€2.002m	€5.76m	€7.762
2015	€1.924m	€5.53m	€7.454
2016	€1.935m	€5.53m	€7.465
2017	€2.265m	€5.695m	€7.960
2018	€2.43m	€5.695m	€8.125

Local Enterprise Development (LEOs)

-	Current	Capital	Total
2014	€10.888m	€18.5m	€29.388
2015	€10.954m	€18.5m	€29.454
2016	€10.431m	€18.5m - Plus - €1m in Supplementary Estimate, December 2016	€29.931
2017	€10.431m	€22.5m	€32.931
2018	€10.431m	€22.5m	€32.931

Brexit Staff

221. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date regarding filling positions for the allocation made in budget 2018 to recruit a further 40 to 50 staff to supplement existing staffing numbers in her Department and agencies under her remit, as a Brexit measure. [20099/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In my Department, a dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016, led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Department and its Agencies response to Brexit. During 2017, this Unit increased its staffing complement to lead on engagements with a broad range of stakeholder to further inform and validate this response.

Given the wide mission my Department has and the continuing impact on all policy matters, officers across all policy areas of my Department may deal with Brexit-related issues.

In this context, staff expertise has been drawn from across a number of different policy areas, and these staff have been assigned to a number of additional postings across the whole Department that have been most impacted by Brexit. We are continually prioritising the Brexit challenges and will actively keep the staffing requirements under review through workforce planning during 2018.

The State Agencies, listed below, received an additional pay allocation in Budget 2018 to manage the impact of Brexit. It is important to note however that the work of very many Business Units both within my Department and its Agencies are impacted by Brexit and are responding to it outside of the specific numbers mentioned below.

Enterprise Ireland

In 2018, Enterprise Ireland was allocated €1.3 million to recruit approximately 20 additional staff members. To date two positions have been filled and the Agency is actively recruiting the remaining positions.

IDA

Budget 2018 saw the Authority allocated an additional €700,000 to further reinforce its staffing levels. The Authority is using this funding to create 10 new positions across a range of areas in the organisation. 9 of 10 posts are filled to date. It will also be used to hire five more graduates on fixed term rolling three year contracts.

Health and Safety Authority

The Health and Safety Authority received an allocation of €400k for Brexit related posts for 2018. Following a review of its Workforce Plan the Authority identified relevant posts to be filled and my Department has given sanction to fill seven inspector posts at this stage. The Health and Safety Authority will commence the recruitment process for these positions in the coming weeks.

It should be noted that previous sanction was given in late 2017 for the filling of a new Brexit related Accreditation Officer post in the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) within the Health and Safety Authority. That recruitment process has recently been completed and the successful candidate is expected to take up the position in early June.

Science Foundation Ireland

SFI were allocated an additional €400k in Budget 2018 and has filled four posts which have Brexit related activities attached to their roles.

Brexit Staff

222. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff recruited in Enterprise Ireland, local enterprise offices, LEOs, InterTradeIreland and IDA Ireland since the Brexit referendum in June 2016, by new staff hires and replacement staff in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20100/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, an additional €3 million was secured for my Department in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 targeted specifically to assist with increased staffing needs for the Department and a number of our Agencies to deal with the evolving Brexit scenario. In Budget 2018, an additional pay allocation of a further €3 million was gained for further strengthening staff resources in respect of Brexit, within the Department and some of its Agencies. These funds have, and are, enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies to recruit additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers in the context of the workload associated with Brexit.

It is important to note however that the work of very many Business Units both within my Department and its Agencies are impacted by Brexit and are working on responding to it despite

not being recruited specifically for this purpose.

The specific information requested by the Deputy in relation to recruitment in Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices, InterTradeIreland and the IDA has been sought, and will be supplied separately as soon as it is available.

Company Law

223. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether accountants are being unfairly penalised by the audit exemption removal provisions in the Companies Act 2014 in respect of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20180/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A company that qualifies as small or micro sized may qualify for the audit exemption. This entitlement is lost if the company fails to file its annual return on time.

At present, over 93% of Irish registered companies meet their filing date obligations. Accordingly, the vast majority of small and micro sized companies file on time and do not, therefore, lose their entitlement to the audit exemption.

Companies can have an annual return date of up to 9 months from the end of their financial year. Thereafter, companies have up to 28 days to file their annual return with the Companies Registration Office and up to an additional 28 days to file their accompanying financial statements. As a result, a company may have up to 11 months to prepare their financial statements.

The Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 simplified and / or reduced the financial reporting obligations on small and micro sized companies. It also raised the thresholds for qualification as a small company, so more companies can now qualify for the audit exemption.

The obligation to file on time is an obligation on the company, not on advisors to the company, such as accountants.

Company Law

224. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason sections 9 and 10 have not been referred to the statutory Company Law Review Group on innovation in respect of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20181/18]

225. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason she has not referred the loss of the audit exemption to the statutory Company Law Review Group in view of the fact it last reviewed the matter in 2009; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20182/18]

226. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a recommendation (details supplied) will be implemented; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20183/18]

228. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Company Law Review group recommended that the Registrar of Companies cease the Companies Registration Office, CRO, waiver scheme whereby the CRO adjudicated on late

filing issues and that the correct forum is in the District Court or the High Court. [20185/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 224 to 226, inclusive, and 228 together.

The Company Law Review Group's ('the CLRG') review of the audit exemption in 2009 led to recommendations to extend the audit exemption to companies limited by guarantee and dormant companies.

The CLRG returned to the issue of the audit exemption in the course of 2011 and this is set out in the Group's published 2011 Report. This more recent examination was a review of the arguments for repealing the rule that a company loses the audit exemption if it files its annual return late. The CLRG did not find those arguments to be sufficiently compelling to outweigh the benefits of retaining the rule.

In 2011, the CLRG also reviewed the system that was in operation at that time whereby the Registrar of Companies could grant a waiver to a company that filed its annual return late. That waiver was from payment of late filing fees. The CLRG did recommend that such a grant should not be within the powers of the CRO. Following the enactment of the Companies Act 2014, that waiver scheme was abolished.

The CLRG went on to recommend that the waiver of late filing fees should instead be determined by a court of competent jurisdiction, preferably the District Court. Section 10 of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 proposes to give effect to that recommendation.

However, since the publication of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 last November, it has become clearer that an application to the Court for a waiver of the late filing fees is not appropriate. Given that the maximum late filing fee that could be waived is €1,200, there appears to be little or no practical benefit for a company when the cost of going to court is taken into account. Section 10 also provides that the Registrar of Companies would be a notice party and this has proved to be a significant administrative burden on the Companies Registration Office. For these reasons, I intend to propose an amendment at Report Stage to delete section 10 as it stands in the Bill.

Before the enactment of the Companies Act 2014, a company could apply to the High Court for an extension of time to file its annual return. In 2011, a draft of the Bill that would become the Companies Bill 2012 was publicly available. Accordingly, the CLRG, as part of its 2011 review, considered the provision in that draft Bill that extended the High Court's power to the District Court. The CLRG welcomed that provision and it was subsequently enacted as section 343 (7) of the Companies Act 2014 and came into operation on 1 June 2015.

The Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 was published in November 2017 and the Company Law Review Group's sub-committee on statutory matters began a consideration of that Bill in January of this year. The report of that sub-committee has not been finalised or adopted by the CLRG yet, so it is not yet published.

Company Registration

227. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if no applications were made under the old regime pursuant to section 60 of the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001 from 2001 to 1 June 2015. [20184/18]

230. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the

reason section 60 of the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001 was introduced into legislation; if it was introduced to facilitate companies as a result of the introduction of the annual return date regime in March 2001 to facilitate the Companies Registration Office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20187/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 and 230 together.

Section 127 of the Companies Act 1963, as amended by section 60 of the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001, provided that a company had to deliver its annual return to the Registrar of Companies not later than 28 days after the annual return date.

The purpose of the amendments made by section 60 was to introduce the concept of an annual return date, being a specific date in each year within 28 days of which a company must file its return. The introduction of the provision allowed the Registrar to better monitor compliance with annual return filing requirements.

The section also provided that the High Court, on an application made (on notice to the Registrar of Companies) by a company, could, make an order extending the time in which the annual return of the company in relation to a particular year could be delivered to the Registrar of Companies. I understand that 1 such application to the Court was made in the period in question.

The ability of individuals to set up a separate legal entity and avail of limited liability is a real and significant privilege as well as being beneficial to the economy and society. As a counterpart to this privilege there are a series of rules and procedures which must be adhered to.

On time filing of annual returns and associated financial statements by companies is an important transparency measure and safeguard for third parties such as creditors and employees. Currently over 93% of companies file their annual return on time. I am proposing amendments for Report Stage of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 that will further support timely filing and simplify the process for all companies.

Question No. 228 answered with Question No. 224.

Company Law

229. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Minister for Justice and Equality and-or the President of the High Court and the Courts Service of Ireland have been consulted with regard to the implications on the resources of the Judiciary and the Courts Service of Ireland in respect of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 as the transfer of these District Court cases to the High Court will cause a huge backlog in the High Court; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20186/18]

231. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans with regard to the result that is being sought in the proposed amendment pursuant to section 9 of the Companies Statutory Audits Bill 2017 whereby companies will be still permitted to seek a waiver of late filing fees and extend their annual return date and not lose audit exemption on the same basis as is contained in section 343 provided they satisfy a High Court judge that it is just to do so and that the application be made in the High Court rather than the District Court. [20188/18]

232. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if

the intention of the proposed amendment in section 10 of the Companies Statutory Audits Bill 2017 is to allow a company that is late seek a waiver on its late filing fees only and that the District Court is not empowered to extend the annual return date or allow the company available audit exemption section 10. [20189/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 229, 231 and 232 together.

Section 9 of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 removes the possibility of a company to apply to the District Court for an extension of its annual return date. Applications may continue to be made to the High Court. The High Court may extend the time for filing of the annual return if it considers the making of such an Order to be 'just' in the circumstances of the application. If a company is granted such an Order, it will not lose its entitlement to an audit exemption. I have no plans to propose amendments to this element of section 9.

Section 10 of the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 proposes to insert a new section 343A into the Companies Act 2014. The effect of this is to introduce the possibility for a company who files its annual return late, to apply to the District Court for an Order waiving the fee for late filing. In such circumstances the company's entitlement to the audit exemption would be lost. I signalled at Committee Stage that I will be tabling amendments to this provision at Report Stage.

The Courts Service is actively consulted with by officials in the Department on any matter that relates to the Courts. The Registrar of Companies will continue to be a notice party for applications to the High Court. Her Office and the Department will keep the possibility of a backlog under review.

Question No. 230 answered with Question No. 227.

Questions Nos. 231 and 232 answered with Question No. 229.

Company Registration

233. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Companies Registration Office has collected more than €215 million in late filing fees alone since the fees were substantially increased to the current levels in October 2001. [20190/18]

234. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if companies are consistently late each year with their statutory filings; if the Companies Registration Office currently takes in on average €10 million per annum on late filing fees representing in or around 10% of companies that are late; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20191/18]

236. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the current compliance rate with the CRO filings is in excess of 90%; and her views on whether the true figure for compliance is probably nearer 97% if the CRO takes into account the average of 6,000 companies that are involuntarily struck off the register each year for non-filing of their returns. [20193/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 233, 234 and 236 together.

8 May 2018

The Companies Registration Office (“CRO”) receives late filing fees, which are paid by companies which have filed their annual return late, or by companies which have been struck off the register for non-filing and are subsequently re-instated to the register by filing all outstanding returns which are late. These moneys are returned directly to the Exchequer upon receipt.

Since 2001 a total of €231,734,854 has been received by the CRO in respect of late filing of annual returns. In 2016 the CRO received just over €10 million in late filing fees. In 2017 it received just over €8 million.

At present over 93% of Irish registered companies meet their filing date obligations. In 2017 5,420 companies were struck off the register for failure to file annual returns.

Company Law

235. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Companies Registration Office has properly assessed the relevance and usefulness of the current statutory filing requirements for the micro company since the commencement into law of the provisions of the Companies Accounting Act 2017. [20192/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 commenced on 9 June 2017 and transposed the 2013 EU Accounting Directive. Along with other amendments to the Companies Act 2014, the 2017 Act introduced the concept of a ‘micro’ category of company, to exist alongside small, medium and large companies.

The obligation on a micro company is to file financial statements annually with the Companies Registration Office (CRO). The CRO is the central repository of public information on Irish companies and business names. The CRO’s Mission Statement is: “to oversee the highest possible rate and quality of annual return filing on the part of companies in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions and to ensure that information on companies published in turn by the CRO is timely and accurately reflects the information provided by those companies.”

The Government is committed to ensuring that the Companies Act 2014 continues to deliver a robust yet competitive corporate regulatory framework for business in Ireland. Consequently, the provisions of the Companies Act 2014, including the recently introduced provisions of the Companies (Accounting) Act 2017, are under continuous review.

Question No. 236 answered with Question No. 233.

Company Registration

237. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Companies Registration Office has a strict zero tolerance policy with regard to companies that are late by more than nine months with their statutory returns and that they immediately enter the integrated enforcement environment and will be listed for strike off. [20194/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Companies Registration Office (CRO) takes a number of measures which are designed to help companies and their directors to comply with their statutory obligations to file annual returns. Letters are issued to companies in advance of their annual return date to notify them that their annual return date is imminent. If a company fails to file on time, it will receive a

further letter from the CRO warning that they have missed their deadline to file annual returns and advising them to file as soon as possible. If a company still does not file it will receive an enforcement warning letter indicating that in the absence of filing of annual returns within 10 weeks of the letter, enforcement action will be commenced against the company. The Registrar is empowered under the Companies Act 2014 to prosecute or to strike off the companies for non-compliance. If the company is selected for strike off, a statutory strike-off notice is issued. This will indicate that in the absence of filing of the outstanding returns, a notice of impending strike off will be inserted in the CRO Gazette within 28 days. 28 days after that notice has appeared in the CRO Gazette, the company will be struck off the register, unless all outstanding returns have been filed. If a company is selected for strike off, the CRO is required by legislation to send only one warning notice. The CRO is not required to issue notification and reminder letters and this course of action is undertaken to help companies to comply with their statutory obligations. Companies who have been struck off the Register are over 1 year late in the filing of their annual returns.

Company Law

238. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Companies Registration Office, in addition to having wide and strong powers to impose substantial late filing fees and to strike companies off the register for non-compliance, can also impose additional on-the-spot fines; and if the CRO has utilised this enforcement mechanism to assist in CRO compliance as an alternative to the removal of the statutory audit for very small micro companies and small companies. [20195/18]

239. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Companies Registration Office has strong and wide-ranging additional powers to prosecute both companies and individual company directors in the District Court for non-compliance with their statutory obligations; and the plans of the CRO in this regard. [20196/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 238 and 239 together.

Section 343 obliges companies to make an annual return to the Companies Registration Office. The requirement for a company to file its annual return on time is an important transparency measure. The financial statements and other information that accompany the annual return provide important safeguards for third parties such as suppliers, creditors and employees by giving access to financial information in relation to a company. It is important that this information is provided on a timely basis to be meaningful.

Under section 874 Companies Act 2014, the Registrar of Companies may deliver a notice to a company or person if the Registrar has reasonable grounds for believing that the company is in default in the delivery, filing or making to the Registrar of a return or similar document required under the Companies Act 2014.

A defaulting person or company must, within the period of 21 days following the issue of a notice of on-the-spot fine by the Registrar to that person or company:

- Remedy the default by filing the outstanding annual return(s), and
- Make to the Registrar a payment of the amount set out in the notice.

The defaulting person or company would be prosecuted if the terms of the on-the-spot fine notice are not complied with within the 21-day period.

To date the Companies Registration Office has not utilised this enforcement mechanism as other measures available to it under the Companies Act 2014 have proved to be effective. The measures available to the CRO where a company is in default of its statutory obligations to file are a Court Order under section 797 Companies Act 2014; prosecution under section 865 or involuntary strike-off under Part 12 Chapter 1.

Company Law

240. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the Company Registration Office's plans with regard to the strong and additional wide ranging powers contained in the Companies Act 2014, in particular with regard to the 714-day warning notice under section 79 that can be sent to the CRO before the Registrar of Companies is entitled to bring a section 797 application before the company and the respondent company directors in the High Court as an alternative to the loss of audit exemption. [20197/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 797 of the Companies Act 2014 provides that the Court may order compliance by a company or officer who has failed to comply with a provision of the Act and has failed to remedy this default within 14 days after the service of a notice requiring the default to be remedied. Section 797(3) provides that the Court may make the Order only on application by one of the following: a member, creditor, the Director of Corporate Enforcement, or the Registrar. Section 797(7) provides that nothing in this section shall prejudice the operation of any enactment imposing penalties. I understand that the Registrar has not, to date, taken an action under this section of the Companies Act 2014.

Company Law

241. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has taken into consideration the peak-time filing deadline of 28 October each year that clashes with the revenue income tax returns deadline of 14 November 2018 and the consequences for accountants with regard to the role of the accountant in assisting the vast majority of companies with their statutory filings. [20198/18]

242. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a sizeable number of applications made on notice to the Registrar of Companies for the section 343 waiver has raised the mental health issues of accountancy practitioners in dealing with a highly stressful environment of satisfying the statutory requirements and meeting deadlines with taxation and CRO matters. [20199/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

Companies can have an annual return date of up to 9 months after their financial year end. Thereafter companies have up to 28 days to file their annual return with the Registrar of Companies and up to a further 28 days to file their accompanying financial statements.

These are final deadlines and therefore it is open to companies, and their accountants where they engage such a service, to submit this information at any time before this date. In this way it is possible for companies and their accountants to manage the deadlines facing them with regard to their statutory obligations.

Furthermore, I am proposing to simplify the filing process further in the Companies (Statutory Audits) Bill 2017 by changing the current two-step process to a single step and giving companies up to 56 days to file their annual return and financial statements. This means a company with a 31 December year end can file its annual return and financial statements any time before 26 November.

Where a company makes an application to the Court for extension of time to file an annual return it may include any information it considers is relevant to the application on the affidavit to the Court. It is a matter for the Court to determine the cases brought before it under section 343 of the Companies Act. The Registrar of Companies does not collate information in relation to accountancy practitioners on the basis set out in the Deputy's question.

Money Laundering

243. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reliefs available to companies and or accountancy or other practitioners with regard to the expected new statutory deadline of 1 November 2018 expected to be introduced shortly with regard to the mandatory e-filing of details of the beneficial owners of companies and industrial and provident societies and co-op's introduced on foot of SI No 560 of 2016 and the provisions of the 4th EU anti-money laundering directive. [20200/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since 15 November 2016, the European Union (Anti-Money Laundering: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2016 (Statutory Instrument No. 560 of 2016) has required all corporate and legal entities to hold adequate, accurate and current information on their beneficial owner(s) in their own register.

Article 30.3 of the EU Fourth Anti-Money Laundering Directive (4AMLD) specifies that Member States are to ensure that such beneficial ownership information is held in a central register.

The Department of Finance is currently working with the OPC on drafting a Statutory Instrument for the establishment of such a central register, which is expected to be made in the coming months, by the Minister for Finance.

Technical work to launch this register as required by the 4th Anti-Money Laundering Directive is at an advanced stage.

Nursing Staff Data

244. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of superannuation contributions paid by nurses of all disciplines in each of the years from 2015 to 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19681/18]

245. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of PSPR deductions paid by nurses of all disciplines in each of the years from 2015 to 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19682/18]

246. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of pension payments received by nurses of all disciplines in each of the years from 2015 to 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19683/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 to 246, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Health Services Staff Data

247. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapy, speech and language and child psychology posts vacant; the locations of each; the length of time they have been vacant; the way in which it impacted on waiting lists by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19612/18]

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

248. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if three MRI scans can be arranged as a matter of urgency for a person (details supplied). [19614/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

249. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a physiological assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19624/18]

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 Provision

250. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that patients (details supplied) cannot avail of a specific HSE service; and if the matter will be examined. [19635/18]

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

Health Services Staff Data

251. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to the announcement on 9 June 2017 regarding the recruitment of 114 assistant psychologists, the number of the 114 who are newly recruited front-line staff as opposed to staff who were previously working unpaid and were subsequently awarded pay with the creation of the graded assistant psychologist post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19644/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health Services Staff Data

252. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of unpaid assistant psychologists working in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19645/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services

253. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for an orthodontic appointment. [19659/18]

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.

Child and Adult Mental Health Services Reports

254. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason that no annual report has been published by CAMHS since 2013. [19661/18]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

255. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for occupational therapy assessments for children between the ages of six and 18 with autism by CHO in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19663/18]

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

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

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

256. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting lists for occupational therapy assessments for children between the ages of six and 18 with autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19664/18]

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

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

Autism Support Services

257. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of the child psychology posts at University Hospital Waterford under relevant headings (details supplied) to support children between the ages of six and 18 with autism in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19665/18]

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

Autism Support Services

258. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Waterford between the ages of six and 18 awaiting autism spectrum disorders, ASD, diagnostic assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19666/18]

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

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

Autism Support Services

259. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of permanent psychologist posts in place for children between the ages of nought and six and six and 18 with autism, respectively, in Waterford city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19667/18]

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

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

Autism Support Services

260. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of permanent psychologist posts in place for children between the ages of nought and six and six and 18 with autism, respectively, in Kilkenny city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19668/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government,

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

261. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if the post of diabetes clinical nurse specialist has been filled in Letterkenny University Hospital following a recent retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19674/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

262. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources (details supplied) to support a second adult consultant endocrinologist-led diabetes team for adult services has been confirmed for Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19675/18]

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

Civil Registration Service

263. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to make additional resources available to County Kerry for civil registration appointments, including the appointment of additional civil registrars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19678/18]

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

Medical Card Applications

264. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card application by a person (details supplied). [19680/18]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

265. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if transplant patients who must take immunosuppressant medication for the rest of their lives following transplantations will be covered under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[19688/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

However, for people who are not eligible for the LTI scheme, there are other arrangements which protect them from excessive medicine costs.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €134 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

People who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of GP consultations.

Psychological Services

266. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the access persons with type 1 diabetes attending Letterkenny University Hospital have to psychology services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19689/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

267. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made to ensure that each child in County Donegal diagnosed with type 1 diabetes under five years of age will have access to start pump therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19690/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

268. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied)

can expect to receive a place in a suitable mental health facility for further supportive interventions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19691/18]

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 Provision

269. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of a diabetes centre of excellence for the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19693/18]

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

270. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff manning the CervicalCheck helpline; his views on whether this is the necessary number of staff to deal with the level of calls to the helpline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19694/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A helpline has been in operation since Friday and has dealt with over 10,000 calls. After some initial problems, calls are now being answered speedily.

I have also arranged for an additional 40 public health staff to provide timely health information and reassurance to women arising from their calls.

Mental Health Services Data

271. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of nights persons under 18 years of age spent in adult psychiatric wards here in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by month, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19708/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

272. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the reason the position of hospital medical officer at Saint Patrick's Hospital, Cashel, County Tipperary, remains unfilled despite the fact that it has been advertised on three occasions; his views on whether the terms and conditions being offered are not attractive enough to make it financially viable for a general practitioner to take on the weekly 16-hour contract; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the vacancy is causing unease for parts of the service at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19711/18]

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.

General Practitioner Services

273. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there is access to general practitioner services midweek after 6 p.m. in Castlebar, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19712/18]

274. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there is access to general practitioner services at the weekends after 6 p.m. in Castlebar, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19713/18]

276. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that attend at Westdoc; the locality from which they come (details supplied); and the number of persons in attendance midweek and weekends by the area in which they reside in tabular form. [19715/18]

277. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the times, days and areas in which Westdoc operates by each location in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19716/18]

278. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the locations and times Westdoc provides a service to remote rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19717/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273, 274 and 276 to 278, inclusive, together.

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

275. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if general practitioners work out of hours in the primary care centre in Castlebar, County Mayo; if not, the reason therefor; if arrangements for general practitioners to work out of hours in the centre will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19714/18]

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.

Questions Nos. 276 to 278, inclusive, answered with Question No. 273.

Hospital Waiting Lists

279. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied)

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will have a surgical procedure carried out in St. James's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19719/18]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

280. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn during court proceedings to the HSE legal strategy regarding a case (details supplied) against clinical pathology laboratories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19738/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I received a briefing note in relation to a legal case which had been taken against MedLab/Clinical Pathology Laboratories Ltd, a company providing cytopathology for CervicalCheck, and the HSE on 16 April 2018.

I received further information on issues related to the communication of the outcome of the CervicalCheck clinical audit process to women in the period after that legal case became public.

I have published that briefing note and set out the information available to me on the record of the Dail on Tuesday, 1 May 2018, including during questions from the opposition.

Cancer Screening Programmes

281. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he or officials from his Department had meetings or briefings with officials of the HSE regarding the tests conducted by clinical pathology laboratories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19739/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have not had any interactions with officials of the HSE in relation to the tests conducted by clinical pathology laboratories.

I am not aware of any interactions between my Department and HSE officials in relation to such tests.

Cancer Screening Programmes

282. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health when his attention was drawn to the scale of the failures regarding the tests conducted by clinical pathology laboratories; and when

his attention was drawn to the HSE legal strategy in a case (details supplied). [19740/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I received a briefing note in relation to a legal case which had been taken against MedLab/Clinical Pathology Laboratories Ltd, a company providing cytopathology for CervicalCheck, and the HSE on 16 April 2018.

I received further information on issues related to the communication of the outcome of the CervicalCheck clinical audit process to women in the period after that legal case became public.

I have published that briefing note and set out the information available to me on the record of the Dail on Tuesday, 1 May 2018, including during questions from the opposition.

Hospital Waiting Lists

283. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the measures he will take to reduce the waiting times for outpatient rheumatology appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19744/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures and outpatient appointments is a key commitment in the Programme for Government. While the Inpatient and Day Case (IPDC) Action Plan was published in April to address waiting times for IPDC procedures, the Outpatient waiting list remains a significant challenge to be addressed in 2018.

Each year, 3.3 million patients attend Hospital Outpatient clinics for appointments. A number of steps, including a national waiting list validation project by the HSE, are being taken to ensure the lists are accurate and these efforts will intensify in the coming months.

The outpatient waiting list figures for March 2018, published by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), show that there is a total of 15,408 patients on the rheumatology outpatient waiting list. Of these 42% of patients are waiting 6 months or less while 34% of patients are waiting over 12 months.

Work has commenced on the development of an Outpatient Department (OPD) Action Plan for 2018. The HSE will work with the NTPF and my Department to finalise a joint plan focused on improving overall use of resources to tackle long patient waiting times and ensuring timely access to treatment and care for patients.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

284. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if extra consultant paediatric rheumatology consultants will be appointed in order that the World Health Organization's guidelines of six for the population is met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19745/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that there are challenges in meeting the growing demand for paediatric rheumatology services, and that the Health Service Executive is working towards improving access to such services. Funding for additional paediatric rheumatology consultant posts will need to be considered in the first instance as part of the 2019 Annual Estimates Process in the context of competing priorities for service development funding.

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In relation to current rheumatology service provision, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

285. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health the waiting period for hernia surgeries in St. James’s Hospital; and when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment. [19746/18]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

286. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of home support for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19761/18]

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

287. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the status of the waiting lists for scoliosis treatment; if the HSE has been successful in recruiting an additional consultant in respect of scoliosis services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19768/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I continue to support the HSE in its efforts to bring down the waiting times for and improve access to scoliosis services. The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 has been prioritised by the Depart-

ment of Health and the HSE in the 2018 HSE National Service Plan.

€9 million funding has been provided in 2018 to improve access to paediatric orthopaedic services including scoliosis. The 2018 HSE National Service Plan includes a commitment from the HSE to continue to improve access to paediatric orthopaedics, including surgery for scoliosis, in conjunction with the Children's Hospital Group to achieve clinically appropriate waiting times. This will be underpinned by the development of a standardised pathway of care for children and adolescents with scoliosis which will be evidence-based and patient-centred.

The HSE, in their Service Plan, has also committed to the development of a service for young adults with scoliosis in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin, and Cap-pagh Orthopaedic Hospital for patients transferring from paediatric services.

In addition, a Paediatric Scoliosis Services Co-Design group is in place, which includes clinicians, hospital staff and representatives from the scoliosis advocacy groups, to design a comprehensive contemporary and patient-centred approach to the delivery of scoliosis services.

The Children's Hospital group advise that as of week ending 27th of April, there were 185 patients on the active spinal waiting list, of which 87 were waiting more than 4 months.

In relation to the recruitment of an additional consultant, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Disability Services Funding

288. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding provided by the HSE to branches of an organisation (details supplied) in County Kerry in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19772/18]

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.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

289. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been waiting for a consultation in the United Kingdom under the treatment abroad scheme; the steps being taken to resolve the matter; when the appointment will issue; the number of Irish women waiting for procedures in the United Kingdom in connection with the removal of a vaginal mesh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19773/18]

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

Child and Adult Mental Health Services

290. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the options available in situations in which a child (details supplied) is self-harming, there are complex additional needs and services have been denied by CAMHS, NDT and primary care and a service; if services in other locations will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19775/18]

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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.

Mental Health Services Staff

291. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason transfers for community mental health nurses are not taking place (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19776/18]

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

Hospital Charges

292. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if a meeting about patients with haemochromatosis having to pay €80 per venesection or phlebotomy therapy has taken place (details supplied); if a decision has been made on waiving charges for persons with haemochromatosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19777/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is 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.

In this context a meeting involving relevant personnel in the HSE and the Department of Health will be held shortly.

Home Care Packages Funding

293. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason a public health centre has no funding to provide extra home care hours for a person (details supplied); and the reason it has no funding for home care hours for other families. [19778/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

294. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels of CAMHS teams by their respective area populations compared with the staffing levels recommended in A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19799/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

295. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels of old age psychiatry teams by their respective area populations compared with the staffing levels recommended in A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19800/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

296. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels of general adult psychiatry teams by their respective area populations compared with the staffing levels recommended in A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19801/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

297. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels of mental health and intellectual disability teams by their respective area populations compared with the staffing levels recommended in A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19802/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

298. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent consultants in perinatal psychiatry in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19803/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

299. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the location of each perinatal psychiatry service in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19804/18]

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.

Maternity Services

300. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of compensation payments made by the HSE on foot of incidents in maternity units in 2017, in tabular form; the amount of each individual payment; and the maternity unit in which the incident took place. [19806/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The management of clinical negligence claims arising from the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients in public healthcare enterprises is delegated to the State Claims Agency, which has a statutory mandate to investigate and manage these cases to completion.

The State Claims Agency has provided the following information in respect of 2017.

The following table shows all compensation payments made and the number of claims they relate to with regard to Maternity Services in the 19 maternity units nationwide in 2017.

The figures include payments related to acute maternity units only, and are broken down by Hospital Group apart from the totals for Hospital Group 4 and Hospital Group 6 which are amalgamated.

The figures relate to compensation payments made to patients and service users only.

The compensation payments included can relate to any type of claim where the service has been recorded as Maternity Services, i.e. birth specific procedures, medication errors, hospital acquired infection etc.

Private Healthcare Schemes are excluded.

Year of Transaction Reporting Date is 2017

Location	Total Damages - €m	Number of claims
Group 1 - RCSI Dublin North East Hospital Group (Academic Partner: RCSI)	4.36	16
Group 2 - Dublin Midlands Hospital Group (Academic Partner: TCD)	32.79	20
Group 3 - Ireland East hospital Group (Academic Partner: UCD)	32.13	28
Group 4 - South South West hospital Group (Academic Partner: UCC) and Group 6 - UL Midwest hospital Group (Academic Partner: UL)	38.03	23
Group 5 - Saolta West North West Hospital Group (Academic Partner: NUIG)	11.82	15
Grand Total	119.13	102

Note: It is important to note that payments may be made in relation to a single claim across multiple transactional years.

Patient Safety

301. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of serious reportable events in 2017 and to date in 2018 that were notified within 24 hours to a designated officer. [19807/18]

302. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of mandatory investigations in 2017 and to date in 2018 that commenced within 48 hours of the events occurring. [19808/18]

303. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of mandatory investigations commenced in 2017 that were completed within four months of notification of the events occurring. [19809/18]

304. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of reportable events in 2017 and to date in 2018 that have been reported within 30 days of occurrence to the designated officer. [19810/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 to 304, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters the questions have been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

The Department of Health takes the management of patient safety very seriously. Recent development include:

- In November 2015, the Government approved a major programme of patient safety reforms which included the establishment of a National Patient Safety Office (NPSO) in the Department of Health. The NPSO was established in December 2016 to oversee a programme of patient safety measures.

- The programme of patient safety centres on initiatives such as the establishment of a national patient advocacy service, the introduction of a patient safety surveillance system, the measurement of patient experience and extending the clinical effectiveness agenda.

- The NPSO is also progressing a programme of legislation in relation to the provision of open disclosure of patient safety incidents, the Patient Safety Bill, which will provide for the mandatory reporting of serious reportable events, and a Patient Safety Licensing Bill, which will introduce a regulatory regime for all hospitals as well as certain designated high risk activities.

In addition, on 25 October 2017, I launched the National Standards on the Conduct of Reviews of Patient Safety Incidents. These standards, developed jointly by HIQA and the Mental Health Commission, set out a new approach to the way health providers respond to, review and investigate incidents in order to determine as quickly as possible what may have transpired, and why, to ensure that they can immediately implement any improvements necessary to prevent a re-occurrence.

Finally, the Health Service Executive (HSE) finalised the review of its safety incident management Policy and launched its new Incident Management Frameworks in January which will support implementation.

HSE Investigations

305. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to in-

investigate a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19820/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

306. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the turnaround time for persons applying for the fair deal scheme in counties Longford and Westmeath; if this is an average time; if there are backlogs in the system; the measures being taken to address this backlog; if the extra cost to families when they must wait for months for the application to be processed, with fees of over €1,000 per week mounting in the interim, has been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19825/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

307. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a urology inpatient procedure at Limerick University Hospital for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19826/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Car Parks

308. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if the dearth of parking at a primary care centre (details supplied) will be reviewed and remedied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19829/18]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

309. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be granted one additional home help hour in the evenings. [19874/18]

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

Medical Products

310. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the patient entitlement including product types and product costs of post-surgery products such as prosthesis swimwear, bras and so on; the application procedure a person wishing to receive such products must follow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19877/18]

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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

311. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason a partial refund was awarded to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19879/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Facilities

312. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in approving the retention of the mobile temporary diagnostic cath lab at Waterford University Hospital; the date when approval issued to the hospital to renew the contract for the mobile lab; if appointments for diagnosis were cancelled which could have been dealt with by the mobile lab; if contract staff operating the lab were redeployed during this period; if a full complement of staff is now available to operate the mobile lab; if the mobile lab was out of operation for periods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19886/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The mobile cath lab was initially deployed in October 2017 and it was agreed on 23 April that it should stay in place for a further number of weeks while recruitment efforts continue to support extension of the existing cath lab operating hours to 12 sessions per week, or by 20%, as recommended in the Herity Report. In regard to the detail of the service issues raised, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

HSE Governance

313. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health when he or the CEO of the HSE

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first learnt of the CervicalCheck scandal; the reason he and the CEO did not know of the scandal earlier; and the systems in place in the HSE to communicate information of this importance to him and the CEO [19889/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I received a briefing note in relation to a legal case which had been taken against MedLab/Clinical Pathology Laboratories Ltd, a company providing cytopathology for CervicalCheck, and the HSE on 16 April 2018.

I received further information on issues related to the communication of the outcome of the CervicalCheck clinical audit process to women in the period after the legal case became public.

I have published that briefing note and set out the information available to me on the record of the Dáil on Tuesday, 1 May 2018, including during questions from the opposition.

Questions relating to the CEO of the HSE are more appropriate for answer by the HSE.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

314. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the international comparison studies his Department has conducted to determine the exclusion of persons over 21 years of age from the FreeStyle Libre device; if studies have been undertaken by his Department to extend the device to those over 21 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19893/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

315. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for an insulin pump at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Portlaoise for persons with type 1 diabetes; the average waiting time across the health service for same; the number of persons on the list for a pump at the hospital; and the number under 18 years of age waiting on the pump at the hospital in tabular form [19894/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Support Services Funding

316. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his views on a newspaper article in relation to an organisation (details supplied); the reason for the decrease in funding for 2018 for the organisation; if the service will be assisted in bridging the financial shortfall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19906/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

317. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if an application by a person (details supplied) for home help hours can be expedited in view of the difficult circumstances for the person and their family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19909/18]

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

Hospitals Building Programme

318. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a new primary health centre will be constructed in Cobh (details supplied) [19921/18]

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

Child and Adult Mental Health Services Funding

319. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the way in which CAMHS is funded in counties Longford and Westmeath; the way in which the budget was spent in 2017; if there was an overrun or deficit in relation to the budget; the way in which the budget compared to previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19926/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

320. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the location of services for each category of patient needing mental health services in County Louth; the waiting list for such services; the number of staff vacancies; the length of time they have been outstanding; his plans to expand mental health services in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19928/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

321. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the system for reimbursement of lidocaine 5% medicated plasters and make them available on the community drug scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19936/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. 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 localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults. This is the patch's only licensed use in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010.

Clinical concern arose when, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. In the case of a negative decision, the treating clinician can appeal the decision. Once a patient is approved for reimbursement support, irrespective of the indication, there is no expiry on the duration of treatment. This also applies to applications already approved by the MMP.

As of 1 May 2018, there have been 6,250 online applications from clinicians requesting the reimbursement lidocaine patches. Of these applications, 1,451 patients (over 23%) have been approved. Of 807 online appeals, over 70% of patients have been approved for reimbursement. The MMP has sought further information on another 71 appeals. Accordingly, since 1 September 2017, 2,019 patients have been approved for reimbursement of lidocaine plasters, based on the clinical case made by their GP or consultant.

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 HSE notified prescribers and pharmacies of the introduction of the new system in August 2017. This advice was re-issued recently, and information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE Medicines Management Programme website at www.hse.ie/yourmedicines.

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

322. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that new medicines are made available to persons with MS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19939/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act sets out criteria for decisions on reimbursement. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed through the community drug schemes, it must submit an application to the HSE to have the new item added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine or refuse to reimburse it. HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention. The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments can be ongoing multi-million euro investments. Pricing issues can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I am keen to engage with industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions in place and must also recognise pricing and funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

I have indicated willingness to meet with MS Ireland and my office is in contact with the organisation to arrange a mutually convenient date.

National Cancer Strategy Implementation

323. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his plans to conduct a review of the HSE following the recent CervicalCheck controversy in order to avoid the recurrence of similar incidents in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19944/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am determined that recent experiences will lead to improvements in the health services. In that regard, today I am bringing a Memo to Government proposing mandatory open disclosure of serious events.

Furthermore, the implementation of the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026, which I launched last year, is progressing and this will lead to improved prevention, diagnosis and treatment measures, resulting in better outcomes for patients.

Health Service Capacity Review

324. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist in having a person (details supplied) placed back on a waiting list. [19948/18]

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

General Practitioner Contracts

325. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Louth that have been assigned a general practitioner by the HSE. [19954/18]

326. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners registered in County Louth in each of the past five years. [19955/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325 and 326 together.

As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Obesity Strategy

327. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 1118 and 1121 of 16 January 2018, the status of the work of the subgroup on reformulation; the terms of reference for the group; if a work plan has been agreed by the group; if it will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19957/18]

328. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 1118 and 1121 of 16 January 2018, when the report on the work of the FSAI to develop baseline data on specific foods (details supplied) will be published; the status of the reformulation work being undertaken by the FSAI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19958/18]

329. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 1118 and 1121 of 16 January 2018, the status of the work that has and is taking place in relation to developing and establishing an effective methodology to monitor and evaluate the impact of the sugar sweetened drinks tax; the person or body responsible for same; the stakeholders involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19959/18]

330. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the subgroup on reformulation will be working with the FSAI on monitoring and validation procedures and setting reformulation targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19960/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 327 to 330, inclusive, together.

The Terms of Reference of the Reformulation sub-group of the Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group are:

- To review existing food and drink reformulation targets such as EU and UK targets for salt, saturated fat and added sugars;

- To make recommendations on short-term and long-term food and drink reformulation

targets and agree a methodology for choosing food and drink product categories; To explore approaches and make recommendations to address reducing portion sizes;

- To devise a mechanism for engagement and consultation with the Food Industry;
- To consider options for implementing recommendations in particular, monitoring and validation procedures; and
- To report within one year.

The Reformulation Sub-Group has met three times since it was formed. It is in the process of developing a roadmap for progressing its work within its Terms of Reference; and is in particular reviewing existing food and drink reformulation targets such as EU and UK targets for salt, saturated fat and added sugars along with working towards agreeing a methodology for choosing food and drink product categories for the purposes of its work on reformulation.

The Group is also continuing its consideration of mechanisms for consulting with industry. Any report of the Reformulation Sub-Group in line with its Terms of Reference can be made available.

The process for the Reformulation Sub-Group's work with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on monitoring, validating and setting reformulation targets will be conducted in the context of the FSAI's representative on the membership of the sub-group. But in addition to this representation, my Department liaises with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) on a regular basis. The FSAI has been validating food industry salt reduction work for many years. It has carried out this work by sampling foods from the market and having them analysed in the HSE Public Analysts Laboratory in Galway. This data is published annually and is available on the FSAI website (*fsai.ie*).

The FSAI is now exploring the validation of food industry sugar and fat reduction work. In the first instance, it generated baseline data on specific foods based on their labelling and a detailed report on this work is imminent. In 2018 the FSAI is validating this baseline data by funding the analysis of breakfast cereal and yoghurts for sugar, fat and salt by an external laboratory.

The National Obesity Policy and Action Plan approved by Government recommended that proposals be developed relating to the roll-out of evidence based fiscal measures, including a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks, in support of healthy eating. As the Deputy is aware, the Sugar-Sweetened Drinks Tax commenced on the 1st of May. It represents a positive step in our national policy to deal with the problem of obesity.

My Department is currently developing proposals for the purposes of conducting an evaluation of the SSD Tax and the work of the Reformulation Sub-Group is likely to feed into a methodology developed for measuring its efficacy.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

331. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Minister for Health the status of the position of a stroke nurse at South Tipperary General Hospital; if there are vacancies for the position in the area; if so, the length of time the post has been vacant; the efforts being made to fill this post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19961/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the

Health Service Executive (HSE) to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

332. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a public consultation with persons and stakeholders on the way in which to improve cardiac services will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19962/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to ensuring that the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services will be informed by the views of all relevant stakeholders. I can confirm that the a public consultation will be launched in June 2018. Both individual members of the public and groups/organisations will be invited to respond to this public consultation.

Health Services Provision

333. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of provision of cardiac rehabilitation capacity to meet the population needs; the status of the self-management support framework being prepared by the health and well-being division within the integrated care programme for chronic disease in which the relevant recommendations of the 2010 to 2019 policy and the recommendation for the development of a community model of cardiac rehabilitation to make services more accessible will be combined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19963/18]

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

Health Services Provision

334. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided in each year since 2010 for the implementation of the national cardiovascular health policy in tabular form; the way in which this funding was broken down across its clinical programmes on heart failure, acute coronary and stroke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19964/18]

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

Health Services Provision

335. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the national review of specialist cardiac services will impact upon a review of the national cardiovascular policy 2010-2019 in view of the short timeframe; if there will be a review of the policy with a view to producing a new one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19965/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): "Changing Cardiovascular Health" has made significant progress for patients with cardiac and stroke disease and continues to provide the policy framework up to the end of 2019. In parallel with the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services, which has a wide-ranging scope and will report in 2019, the HSE has com-

menced work on a costed five-year strategy for stroke in the key areas of prevention, acute care, rehabilitation and restoration to health. This process is well underway and is anticipated to be finalised later in 2018.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

336. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a review has been carried out or is planned of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 to examine the success in implementing its recommendations and those that are outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19966/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this PQ relates to approximately 70 recommendations, dealing with all aspects of cardiovascular care comprehended by the 2010-2019 Policy and involving a range of organisations, my Department will provide the deputy with a comprehensive report in tabular format within 2 weeks.

Hospital Services

337. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 359 of 27 March 2018 and 914 of 17 April 2018, the contingency plans in place should the existing neuro interventional angiography suite at Beaumont Hospital cease to operate suddenly in view of the recognition of its need to be replaced and for a further suite to be in place; if there is a facility in the capital allocation for such emergencies; if consideration has been given to same in further view of the increase in the thrombectomy services (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19967/18]

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

Obesity Strategy

338. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 395 of 20 February 2018, the status of the monitoring body to be designated to monitor the voluntary codes of practice on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages; the timeframe for the designation of the body; the timeframe for the development of guidelines for implementation of the code and mechanisms for monitoring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19968/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The national Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP) was approved by the Government in 2016. The OPAP recommended that a code of practice for food and beverages promotion, marketing and sponsorship be developed, implemented and evaluated in conjunction with the food industry, HSE, Dept of Children and Youth Affairs, safefood, Food Safety Authority of Ireland and advertiser organisations. The OPAP premised this recommendation by providing that 'already there are many examples of the food industry making positive contributions to the prevention of obesity and it is essential to capitalise and expand on such initiatives'.

The group that developed the Codes involved representatives from the food industry, advertising sector, statutory agencies, and various Government Departments. It was chaired by the former CEO of the statutory Food Safety Authority of Ireland. The Codes of Practice concerned

were published in February.

The Codes of Practice are one of the suite of actions set out in the OPAP in the knowledge that no single sector or agency, or no single action, is able to solve this issue on their own. Everyone and every sector has a role to play in those solutions.

Section 10 of the Codes of Practice provides for a governance framework for these codes. It stipulates that the Codes ‘will be monitored for compliance and effectiveness by a monitoring body designated by the Minister for Health’ and that the Codes ‘will be underpinned by guidance developed by the monitoring body with respect to its application’. It is not possible at this juncture to specify a timeframe for the development of the latter; but work on the establishment of the monitoring body is underway, and I expect that significant progress will be made in this regard in the coming months.

Medical Card Eligibility

339. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if eligibility for a medical card will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19969/18]

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

However, the HSE require additional information to investigate this issue and my Department has contacted the Deputy’s office regarding the missing information which the HSE requires. This information is not yet available and the Deputy’s office has been asked to forward it directly to the HSE as soon as they receive it so this matter may be investigated.

Hospital Waiting Lists

340. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for person (details supplied); his plans to reduce the waiting list in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19970/18]

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.

Ambulance Service

341. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the status of his most recent meeting regarding ambulance services in south and west County Donegal; his plans to improve the level of services in County Donegal; the timeframe for the improvements on foot of his recent meeting on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20010/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I met this group on 24 April 2018 at the Department of Taoiseach and listened to their concerns regarding this matter. I have arranged for the Director of the National Ambulance Service to meet with the group to discuss their concerns.

Cancer Screening Programmes

342. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of women in County Louth who were misinformed that their cervical smear tests were normal. [20015/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have referred his question to the HSE for direct reply.

Cancer Screening Programmes

343. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if the 2014 audit of cervical smear tests contained tests of women in County Louth. [20016/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have referred his question to the HSE for direct reply.

Respite Care Services

344. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the status of a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20018/18]

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

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

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

HSE Legal Cases

345. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the funding set aside on an annual basis for contingent liability for the past ten years to date by the HSE; the way in which

the amount is determined by the HSE; if the HSE carries out an actuary analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability; and if the HSE conducts a risk assessment in the context of contingent liability. [20023/18]

352. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funds set aside on an annual basis for contingent liability for the past ten years to date in 2018; the way in which it is determined the amount that is forecast to be needed for contingent liability; if he carries out an actuary analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability; if he conducts a risk assessment in the context of contingent liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20063/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 345 and 352 together.

International financial accounting standards require an entity to recognise a provision for a contingent liability if, and only if a present obligation (legal or constructive) has arisen as a result of a past event (the obligating event), payment is probable ('more likely than not'), and the amount can be estimated reliably.

The HSE has not recognised any contingent liabilities in the last ten years. This is mainly due to the fact that the nature of such liabilities for the HSE mainly arise as a result of current ongoing litigation. Due to this, it is difficult to determine a) if payment will be probable or b) to calculate a reliable estimate of the potential cost to the HSE until the current test cases have gone through the courts. Also disclosing any amount could be deemed prejudicial to the issue. Whilst no provision is made, contingent liabilities are reflected in Note 26 to the HSE Annual Financial Statements each year.

Funding is allocated to the Department on the basis of costs that will be incurred during the year and is not allocated for possible future funding liabilities. On this basis, material contingent liabilities funding will only be allocated when the cost associated with it crystallises. At such time, the Department of Health will engage with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to funding for the actual cost that the Department will incur. There has been no crystallisation of a contingent liability for the Department in the last ten years.

HSE Data

346. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if all written agreements between the HSE and an organisation (details supplied) on the provision of all services within the organisation's remit will be made publicly available; and if all details of monetary transfers between the Exchequer and the organisation will be published. [20027/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the first part of the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Having regard to the second part of the question, the Department of Health would not have information regarding details of monetary transfers between other Government Departments and agencies, and the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

Hospital Beds Data

347. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the reason more beds have not

been made available at Mallow General Hospital; and the reason there is spare capacity in the hospital in view of the fact that CUH is beyond capacity. [20028/18]

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

348. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has been referred for orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20035/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

349. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with representatives of an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry regarding access to new and effective medication for multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20039/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act sets out criteria for decisions on reimbursement. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed through the community drug schemes, it must submit an application to the HSE to have the new item added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine or refuse to reimburse it.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments can be ongoing multi-million euro investments. Pricing issues can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I am keen to engage with industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled

must be compatible with the statutory provisions in place and must also recognise pricing and funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

I have indicated willingness to meet with MS Ireland and my office is in contact with the organisation to arrange a mutually convenient date.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

350. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the reason, when it is the case that medical card holders of pension age are entitled to State-funded physiotherapy, transport to medical appointments, dressings and other medical entitlements, residents of private nursing homes are required to pay for these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20044/18]

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

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

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

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home.

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

Health Services Provision

351. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if the ketogenic diet will be available from Cork University Hospital to persons who could benefit from it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20046/18]

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

Question No. 352 answered with Question No. 345.

Mental Health Services Expenditure

353. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the budget available to the HSE Cork South Lee for mental health services in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20071/18]

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

Hospitals Policy

354. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied there is proper democratic accountability in respect of governance and budgetary oversight of all hospitals within the South-South West hospital group. [20072/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE's Performance and Accountability Framework (PAF) makes explicit the responsibilities of health service managers in relation to the four domains of performance, which are: Access to and Integration of services, the Quality and Safety of those services, specific Financial, Governance and Compliance requirements and effectively harnessing the efforts of the Workforce. The emphasis of the Framework is on recognising good performance, improving performance at all levels of the health service and ensuring that individual managers are held to account for their performance.

The Framework ensures that named senior health service managers designated as Accountable Officers, including all Hospital Group CEOs, are explicitly and personally accountable for performing within their budget allocation. The sole line of executive accountability for the Hospital Group CEO is to the National Director for Acute Hospital Services.

Accountable Officers are provided with a budget to deliver the services set out in the National Service Plan and in their service level operational plans. They are accountable for their performance in delivering against these plans within budget, and for any specified performance improvements. Accountable Officers are responsible for preparing a financial plan in line with their Performance Agreement which sets out the actions that they will take to meet the agreed performance targets across the four domains of performance outlined above.

It is a core responsibility of managers to manage the delivery of services for which they are accountable and they are required to keep performance under constant review, have in place a monthly performance management process and take timely corrective actions to address any underperformance emerging. Under the PAF, Hospital Group CEOs are expected to have formal monthly performance management processes in place with their direct reports who are accountable at hospital level, to satisfy accountability requirements under the PAF. This includes the Voluntary Hospitals within their Group (this responsibility exercised via the Service Level Arrangement (SLA) signed by the Group CEO with each Voluntary Hospital).

In relation to the governance and budgetary oversight of hospitals within the South/South West Hospital Group specifically, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly as soon as possible.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

355. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when an application on behalf of a child (details supplied) in County Cork for an item of equipment was received by the HSE; when the equipment will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20114/18]

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 Legal Cases

356. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the policy of the HSE in respect of non-disclosure and confidentiality clauses being included in circumstances in which settlements are reached in or out of court by the HSE and a person taking a case against the HSE in the broad area of medical negligence or a failure of a duty of care; the number of such non-disclosure and confidentiality clauses that have been entered into by the HSE or representatives on its behalf in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20119/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The management of clinical indemnity claims relating to the HSE has been delegated to the State Claims Agency under section 9 of the National Treasury Management (Amendment) Act 2000.

The State Claims Agency has advised my officials that it settles very few claims which are subject to a confidentiality agreement with the exception of cases settled through mediation. It has noted that part of the process of mediation is that parties are bound by a strict confidentiality provision contained in the mediation agreement. In the very rare case that the Agency agrees a confidentiality proviso, it is usually because of some extremely sensitive, controversial or disputed element of a claim which may be requested by either party.

The Agency has further advised that it does not formally record, on its IT system, the fact that any individual settlement is bound by a confidentiality clause. Therefore, this information is not readily available.

Cancer Screening Programmes

357. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the National Screening Service will implement the recommendations of the HIQA review of information management practices at BreastCheck; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20120/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): HIQA published their Review of Information Management Practices at BreastCheck on 8 March 2018 and the National Screening Service has already commenced work on the implementation of the majority of the recommendations. Full implementation is envisaged but this will take some time to achieve.

Hospitals Car Park Charges

358. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the amount earned from the car park of Tallaght hospital in 2017; and the amount for 2016. [20149/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the

HSE to respond to the Deputy directly, as soon as possible.

Hospitals Car Park Charges

359. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the HSE car park income for 2017 for each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20150/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In March, I requested that the HSE carry out a review of hospital car parking charges, with the aim of establishing clear national guidelines in this area. The review will involve the relevant stakeholders and will take account of the income generated by charges, the impact of any reduction in car parking income on hospital services and the views of patient advocacy groups. The HSE expects that the review will be completed by mid 2018.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to her directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

360. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 466 of 27 February 2018, if the two paediatric outpatient and urgent care centres in Connolly and Tallaght hospitals are still on schedule to open in mid-July 2018 and 2019. [20151/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I would like to refer to the Deputy's previous Parliamentary Question No. 466 of 27 February 2018. Unfortunately, due to an administrative error, incorrect dates for the opening of the two paediatric outpatient and urgent care centres were provided to the Deputy in that reply. My Department is arranging for the Dáil record to be corrected and I apologise for this error.

The Paediatric Outpatients & Urgent Care Centres at Connolly Hospital and Tallaght Hospital are on schedule to open in mid 2019 and 2020 respectively, in advance of the planned opening in late 2022 of the main hospital on the St James's Hospital campus.

The Children's Hospital Group has commenced the process for recruitment of the consultant posts to support the opening of the centres at Connolly and Tallaght Hospitals.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data

361. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in CHO area 9 who received an electric powered wheelchair in each of the years 2015 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018; the average waiting time to receive such a wheelchair in those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20153/18]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

362. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase home care services in County Wexford in circumstances in which families are struggling to provide vital care necessary for their family members' health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20156/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

363. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on CAMHS waiting lists by age and gender in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20157/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

364. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on primary care psychology waiting lists by age and gender in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20158/18]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

365. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid to a company (details supplied) in each of the years since 2008 to analyse smear tests; the number of smear tests it analysed in each year; and if he will provide the same information in respect of clinical pathology laboratories and other laboratories here or overseas for the years in which they had a contract to analyse smear tests. [20165/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am establishing a Scoping Inquiry in relation to issues that have arisen at CervicalCheck.

A range of issues in relation to cytology laboratory services contracted by CervicalCheck will be examined under the terms of reference of that Inquiry.

Mental Health Services Provision

366. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed regarding mental health in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20169/18]

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

Medical Card Appeals

367. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused medication on a medical card. [20204/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. 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 localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults. This is the patch's only licensed use in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010.

Clinical concern arose when, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. The treating clinician may appeal a negative decision to the MMP, making a clinical case for reimbursement.

As of 1 May 2018, there have been 6,250 online applications from clinicians requesting the reimbursement lidocaine patches. Of these applications, 1,451 patients (over 23%) have been approved. Of 807 online appeals, over 70% of patients have been approved for reimbursement. The MMP has sought further information on another 71 appeals. Accordingly, since 1 September 2017, 2,019 patients have been approved for reimbursement of lidocaine plasters, based on the clinical case made by their GP or consultant.

This process supports appropriate use and prescribing and both post-shingles patients and other appropriate cases can continue to be treated with lidocaine plasters. While I cannot comment on individual cases, it is open to a patient's clinician to appeal a decision to refuse reimbursement.

Reimbursement decisions are a matter for the HSE. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Ministerial Meetings

368. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the bilateral meetings he has had since 1 January 2018 with his EU counterparts in which he discussed CAP funding post-2020; and the date of each meeting in which this was raised in tabular form. [19780/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Since January 2018, I have held six bilateral meetings with EU Agriculture Ministers. The shape of the CAP Post 2020 was a significant feature of the discussion on each occasion (see table for details). Recent meetings with the German Minister on 2 May and the French Minister on 3 May coincided with the publication of the European Commission's Multi Annual Financial Framework (MFF) proposals on 2 May. I used these meetings to outline my concerns these MFF proposals will have on the CAP.

Additional meetings are scheduled to take place with my counterparts from Poland, Romania and Belgium over the next few weeks.

In addition to these formal bilateral meetings, I regularly meet my Ministerial counterparts at the monthly Agri-Fish Council meetings, and will have a further opportunity to discuss the future of the CAP at the forthcoming informal Council meeting in Sofia on 5 June.

My Department officials are also having regular and constructive engagement with their EU counterparts.

Bilateral meetings since January 2018 where CAP Post 2020 was discussed

Date	With	Where
02/02/18	France	Paris
19/02/18	Hungary	Brussels
16/04/18	Austria	Luxembourg
25/04/18	Netherlands	The Hague
02/05/18	Germany	Berlin
02/05/18	France	Paris

Harbours and Piers Development

369. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to develop the harbour at Dunmore East, County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19932/18]

372. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the development of Dunmore East harbour to facilitate a shared use of the harbour by fishermen, visiting cruise ships, the RNLi and the Coast Guard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19935/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 369 and 372 together.

Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute. It is first and foremost a busy working fishery harbour which also provides for other complementary ancillary activities, seafood processing enterprises, cruise liner visits and other marine leisure enterprises.

The development of the defining infrastructure in Dunmore East for the purposes of supporting the fishing industry commenced in the 1960's and was completed in the early 1970's. The infrastructure places limits on Harbour managements' ability to cater for and safely facilitate an ever increasing demand for diverse and additional usage.

At all times safety is a primary concern, and my Department, specifically local Harbour Management has and will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure that the core fishing activity continues and is managed appropriately, while balancing this priority with the safe operation of all other Harbour activity.

In regard to developments in the Harbour, I am happy to advise the Deputy that in excess of €14 million has been invested in maintenance, development and upgrading works at Dunmore East FHC as part of my Department's Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme from 2010 to 2017, most notably including the €6 million dredging project in 2015 which has improved conditions for fishing vessels in the harbour and manoeuvrability for fish landings.

In addition, I allocated further funding of €2.4 million this year for the ongoing maintenance and development of Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre. Significant works in this year's capital programme include the continuation of the West Wharf upgrade works scheduled for completion in the coming months at a total cost in the region of €3 million.

I also expect that the development of the area known as Shanoon will be completed this year. This area has been used in recent years as a car park, the surface of the area has been in very poor condition and required work to bring it to a satisfactory standard for users. Ninety two car parking spaces will be provided in this development which is expected to cost in the region of €250,000. A new drainage network is being installed as part of these works, as well as new footpaths. Lighting columns will also be located at various locations throughout the parking areas. The existing earthen embankments will be retained where possible throughout the car parking areas. Visibility over the embankments out to sea is to be maintained.

These substantial investments demonstrate my ongoing commitment to the development of Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre. As the Deputy is aware, all developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres will be considered under future Capital Programmes on the basis of available exchequer funding and competing national priorities.

Harbours and Piers Development

370. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports available to deepen the harbour at Dunmore East to facilitate visits from cruise ships; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19933/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute. It is first and foremost a busy working fishery harbour which also provides for other complementary ancillary activities, seafood processing enterprises, cruise liner visits and other marine leisure enterprises.

The development of the defining infrastructure in Dunmore East for the purposes of supporting the fishing industry commenced in the 1960's and was completed in the early 1970's.

The infrastructure places limits on Harbour managements' ability to cater for large ocean going cruise liners. These vessels cannot berth in Dunmore East and consequently anchor in the channel and passengers are tendered into Dunmore East.

At all times safety is a primary concern, and my Department, specifically local Harbour Management has and will continue to work positively with the interested parties to ensure that this activity can continue to operate in a safe manner having consideration for other Harbour

Activities.

As part of my Departments Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, a €6 million dredging project within the Harbour was completed in 2015. Responsibility for deepening the channel outside the confines of the Harbour boundary would be a matter for the Port of Waterford.

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

371. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to support the repair of a pontoon recently damaged and used by the RNLI at Dunmore East; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19934/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

The pontoon the Deputy refers to is the property and responsibility of the the RNLI. The RNLI does have a conveyancing arrangement with my Department.

Unfortunately, the pontoon in question recently sustained some damage. I am aware that the RNLI has removed the pontoon from the Harbour to enable repairs be carried out. My Department will facilitate the reinstatement of the pontoon on the completion of the repairs.

Question No. 372 answered with Question No. 369.

GLAS Appeals

373. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS 2 appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19615/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named has received the due GLAS payments for 2016 and also a payment for the 2017 advance. As the person named did not adequately demonstrate eligibility for a LIPP action the 2017 payment was made without payment for this action.

In the event that the applicant does not meet his or her obligations under the terms and conditions and is subsequently removed from the scheme, a review and appeals process is available and outlined in the terms and conditions.

The person named has been provided with the details on the procedures to appeal the decision made in this case.

Basic Payment Scheme Administration

374. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the deadline for basic payment scheme applications will be extended to 15 June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19676/18]

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

recent discussion at EU level, the EU Commission is currently drafting legislation in relation to an extension to the deadline for the submission of BPS applications. Any such extension would be voluntary for Member States. Ireland has not requested a deadline extension in respect of BPS applications.

2018 is the first year that all BPS applications are to be made online, and in 2017 114,000 BPS applications were made online. In order to support farmers in making the move to online applications my Department has put in place a range of supports for farmers. The Department is in ongoing contact with farmers in order to ensure that all applications are made online by 15 May. Over 90,000 farmers have already applied online, and the overall application rate is ahead of previous years.

It should be noted that any extension to the deadline for receipt of applications would have an adverse impact on the delivery of BPS payments in October 2018.

European Fisheries Fund

375. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding drawn down in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2014-2020, by county and fishing port, in tabular form; the details of funding in each of the seafood sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19753/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme is the vehicle for financial supports to the seafood sector up to 2021. The Programme delivers a wide range of supports for aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing through a suite of 17 schemes.

The following table provides information relating to expenditure under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Programme up to 2017. Information is not compiled on beneficiaries by county or fishing port. Data on 2018 expenditure is not yet available.

Union Priority	Scheme	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
€	€	€	€	€	€	€
UP1	Sustainable Fisheries	0	0	776,537	2,656,152	3,432,689
UP1	Marine Biodiversity	0	0	275,000	1,160,275	1,435,275
UP1	Inshore Fisheries	0	0	335,598	472,774	808,372
UP1	New Fishermen	0	0	0	55,800	55,800
UP2	Sustainable Aquaculture	0	0	802,566	1,478,690	2,281,256
UP2	Knowledge Gateway	0	0	932,683	1,462,582	2,395,265
UP3	Data Collection	5,873,241	6,047,337	6,558,760	7,894,000	26,373,338

Union Priority	Scheme	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
UP3	Control and Enforcement	0	1,310,739.87	2,928,688	4,191,204	8,430,632
UP4	Fisheries Local Development	0	0	0	1,774,563	1,774,563
UP5	Producer Organisation	0	0	609,669	520,870	1,130,539
UP5	Seafood Promotion	0	0	833,000	919,790	1,752,790
UP5	Seafood Processing Development	0	0	3,516,191	3,800,397	7,316,588
UP6	Blue Growth & Marine Spatial Planning	0	0	55,400	136,554	191,954
	Technical Assistance	0	0	0	1,098,995	1,098,995
	Totals	5,873,241	7,358,077	17,624,092	27,622,646	58,478,055

Beef Exports

376. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the quota regime in operation since 2009 pertaining to US hormone-free beef exports annually to the EU in terms of tonnage and value; and the amount of the annual quota that has been used each year in tabular form. [19754/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2009, the European Union and the United States concluded an agreement which provided for an interim solution to their long-standing WTO dispute regarding the use of certain growth-promoting hormones in beef production.

Under the agreement, in return for US assurances not to raise sanctions, the European Union opened a tariff rate quota, on an autonomous and MFN basis (open to all qualifying countries, including the US), for imports of 20,000 tons of high quality beef at zero duty, in line with all EU import requirements, including that it must be hormone-free. This tariff rate quota was increased to 45,000 tonnes after three years.

The annual use of quota over the period in question, as per information from the European Commission, is attached. The detail on the value of these imports is not available.

2009	% Use of Quota	2010	% Use of Quota	2011	% Use of Quota	2012	% Use of Quota
Tonnes		Tonnes		Tonnes		Tonnes	
9330	47	14377	72	16090	80	17389	39

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2009	% Use of Quota	2010	% Use of Quota	2011	% Use of Quota	2012	% Use of Quota
2013	% Use of Quota	2014	% Use of Quota	2015	% Use of Quota	2016	% Use of Quota
Tonnes		Tonnes		Tonnes		Tonnes	
17014	38	17664	39	18311	40	15518	34
2017 -	%Use of Quota						
Tonnes							
15432	34						

Basic Payment Scheme Data

377. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 765 to 769, inclusive, of 20 March 2017, if all the data requested has been compiled. [19755/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Responses to the individual listed Parliamentary Question's will issue directly to the Deputy this week. Please note, Department records indicate that the response to Parliamentary Question No. 766 has previously issued. A copy of this reply will now issue again to the Deputy.

EU Regulations

378. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on EU regulation 1306/2013 (Art. 75(1)(4)); and the way in which from 2018 payments will be made by 30 June the following year. [19756/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The provisions of Article 75 of Regulation 1306/2013 were amended by Article 2 of Regulation 2017/2393. Consequently, the deadline of 30 June of the following calendar year for payments to beneficiaries of rural development measures, as defined in Article 67 of the amended regulation, will now apply in respect of aid applications or payment claims submitted from claim year 2019 rather than claim year 2018 as previously stipulated.

This amendment was introduced to address issues arising from the harmonisation of payment deadlines for area-related payments between the EAGF and the EAFRD and the additional flexibility provided by the extension of the transitional period by another year is to be welcomed.

EU Regulations

379. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations that apply to the yellow card approach for land eligibility inspections and cross-compliance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19757/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Article 99 of Regulation (EU) No. 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council provides that where a Cross Compliance breach is deemed to be minor in nature and remedial action is taken,

no monetary sanction will apply.

The “Yellow Card” provision in relation to land eligibility checks is prescribed in Article 19a of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No. 640/2014 and applies to those cases where a determined over-declaration in area is greater than 3% or 2 hectares, but does not exceed 10%. For such cases the penalty will be further reduced by 50%, subject to specific additional criteria. This provision applies to the applications under the Basic Payment Scheme, the Young Farmers Scheme and the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme only.

My Department applies both of these provisions.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

380. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average support per hectare under the BPS and greening scheme nationally and by county based on 2017 data; the value per farm holding in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19758/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The data requested is not normally published in the format requested by the Deputy. Material is currently being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy when available. Not all the data requested may be available.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

381. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of the basic payment scheme, BPS, whose entitlements have reached at least 60% of the basic payment scheme national average based on 2017 data. [19759/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of persons in receipt of the Basic Payment Scheme whose entitlements have reached at least 60% of the Basic Payment Scheme national average based on 2017 data is thirty three thousand, one hundred and seventeen (33,117).

Basic Payment Scheme Data

382. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of the basic payment scheme, BPS, who received a payment per hectare in ranges (details supplied) based on 2017 data in tabular form. [19760/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information being requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Fodder Crisis

383. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will reconsider his decision and implement a meal voucher scheme in view of the ongoing

fodder crisis; his plans to use the EU crisis fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19824/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In response to pressures on fodder supplies caused by a long wet winter and spring I introduced a national Fodder Transport Support measure in January of this year, followed in April by a Fodder Import Support measure. These two interventions working together effectively addressed issues around fodder availability in the country. Grass growth, as confirmed by Teagasc assessments, has continued to improve significantly and livestock are out to graze. However, ground conditions were slow to improve in some areas and in a concluding response to remaining fodder difficulties I decided to extend both measures by one week until yesterday 7th May.

It is important that we learn some of the lessons from this spring and build resilience into our systems going forward. I have asked Teagasc to chair a stakeholder group to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this summer around replenishing stocks that have been used up.

Fishing Industry

384. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions that have been taken to date to progress proposals to establish a consultation process to review the options for more restricted access for large fishing vessels fishing by means of trawls inside the six nautical mile zone; if submissions from all interested stakeholders are being accepted in respect of same; if so, the timeframe for submissions to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19878/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The public consultation process on trawling activity within the 6 nautical mile zone began on Monday 30th April 2018 and will run to Monday 11th June 2018. The consultation paper and accompanying reports by the Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara are available on the Department's website, along with information on how to participate in the consultation process.

GLAS Applications

385. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19892/18]

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

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks in this case. Once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

386. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[19931/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in my Department's Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). This person is fully up to date with their payment under the scheme.

Bord Bia Staff

387. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of new staff hires and replacement staff, respectively, recruited in Bord Bia since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19949/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The question of new staff hires and replacement staff recruited since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 within the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Bord Bia and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

State Bodies Data

388. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of new staff hires and replacement staff recruited since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 in State agencies and bodies under his aegis (details supplied) by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19950/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The question of new staff hires and replacement staff recruited since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 within the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the Agencies in question and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

State Bodies Funding

389. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of funding allocated to Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Teagasc and the Marine Institute by capital and current allocations in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [19951/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The allocations voted to the bodies listed are set out in the following tables. As allocations are voted for the calendar year the information for 2018 is in respect of the full year rather than year to date.

In addition to the allocations voted to Teagasc and Bord Bia, those bodies receive additional funding from my Department in respect of other specific programmes they administer. Teagasc also receives payments in respect of the provision of certain services.

Teagasc

-	Current	Capital
2014	107,210	1,500
2015	109,639	1,500
2016	113,880	2,400
2017	124,920	3,210
2018	129,432	5,150

When my department's vote structure was amended in 2017, the Teagasc subhead was changed to include directly an amount of €10.5m for training which it received under a separate sub head before 2017.

Bord Bia

-	Current	Capital
2014	28,690	0
2015	31,744	0
2016	32,492	0
2017	41,092	0
2018	41,266	0

Marine Institute

-	Current	Capital
2014	13,480	10,000
2015	18,121	8,500
2016	19,309	10,000
2017	21,563	10,000
2018	22,465	10,000

Bord Iascaigh Mhara

-	Current	Capital
2014	11,984	6,500
2015	12,516	6,500
2016*	19,430	11,750
2017*	21,588	18,000
2018	26,025	13,100

*Revised allocation post 2016 and 2017 Supplementary Estimate Process.

Live Exports

390. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of revenue that would be forgone in each category (details supplied) in the livestock sector if the fee amount for each was reduced by percentages, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19952/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Last year my Department reduced the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under three months of age to €1.20 per animal, from €4.80. This gave an important boost to the trade in

young calves, and brought greater equity in the fees payable for calves, weanlings and adult cattle.

Exports of calves rose by 20%, to just over 100, 000, in 2017 compared to 2016. The inspection fee for bovines over three months remains unchanged at €4.80.

The cost of reducing the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under three months of age can be illustrated as follows:

Veterinary inspection fees for a load of say 100 calves under three months of age come to €120. If reduced by 20%, the inspection fee would come to €96. If reduced by 40%, the inspection fee would come to €72. If reduced by 60%, the inspection fee would come to €48. If reduced by 80%, the inspection fee would come to €40.

Similarly, the cost of reducing the veterinary inspection fee payable on bovines over three months of age can be illustrated as follows:

If the inspection fee of €4.80 was reduced by 20%, the inspection fee for a load of 100 cattle would come to €384. If reduced by 40% the inspection fee would come to €288. If reduced by 60%, the inspection fee would come to €192. If reduced by 80%, the inspection fee would come to €96.

Animal health and welfare are important contributory factors to the quality and safety of food, and to the prevention of the spread of animal diseases. The veterinary inspection of live animals for export contributes to maintaining Ireland's reputation as an exporter of livestock of high health status, which is vital to my Department's ongoing efforts to source additional markets abroad. EU Member States are obliged under the EU Official Controls Regulation (882/2004) to carry out official controls to verify compliance with animal health and welfare rules.

Quality Assurance Schemes

391. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the proposal that all animals which come from a quality assured farm should receive the some level of bonus as a way to encourage farmers to participate fully in the Bord Bia quality assurance schemes; the cost of introducing such a measure; and the number of farmers participating in all such schemes, in tabular form. [20047/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I have no role in setting pricing structures for any market commodity.

The Quality Assurance Schemes operated by Bord Bia have been developed over a period of years and extend beyond the farm gate as vertical industry integrated schemes. Participation in the schemes is voluntary. The latest iteration of the quality assurance scheme, was launched in April 2017.

The scheme was developed partly to address the increasing demand from purchasers of Irish meat products, both nationally and internationally, for verifiable evidence that Irish meat, including beef, was produced sustainably on farms that were certified members of an accredited Quality Assurance Scheme. This evidence which comes from participation in the schemes adds value to farmers businesses.

I understand that at the end of 2017 there were 51,500 farmers accredited to the scheme. Information relating to operational matters can be obtained directly from Bord Bia.

Forestry Data

392. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the planting targets per hectare for categories (details supplied) over the 2014 to 2017 period for the forestry programme 2014-2020; the actual number of hectares planted in each year for the categories; and the number of hectares planted out of each annual target set on a percentage basis, in tabular form. [20049/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Planting under the forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 commenced in 2015. My Department recently completed a mid-term review of the Forestry Programme, the results of which were published last February. The table below, included in the MTR, shows the target area in each of the categories and that actually planted for the years 2015 to 2017.

Grant and Premium Categories (GPC)	Forestry Programme Target	Actual Plant-edArea (ha)	% of Target	Forestry Programme Target	Actual-Plant-ed Area (ha)	% of Target	Forestry Programme Target	Actual-Plant-edArea (ha)	% of Target
	2015	2015	2015	2016	2016	2016	2017	2017	2017
Overall target	6,000	6,293	104.88	6,660	6,500	97.60	7,140	5,536	77.54
GPC 1 - 8	5,440	6,155	113.14	5,990	6,340	105.84	6,165	5,262	85.35
Native Wood-land	450	134	29.78	450	159	35.33	450	269	59.78
Agro-forestry	10	0	0.00	20	1	5.00	25	5	20.00
Forestry for fibre	100	0	0.00	200	0	0.00	500	0	0.00

Forestry Data

393. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants for each listed planting category (details supplied) over the 2014 to 2017 period for the forestry programme 2014-2020 by farmer and non-farmer respectively, in tabular form; and the current grant premium rates in operation for each category. [20050/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently collating the figures for the planting categories by Farmer and non-Farmer as requested and they will be with the Deputy shortly.

Following the recent mid-term review of the Forestry Programme, the results of which were published on my Department's website, I introduced new Grant and Premium rates for each of the grant and premium categories. I would like to highlight that a higher annual premium is now available for new plantings on sites over 10ha.

GPC	1st Grant	2nd Grant €/ha	Additional fencing Allocation (IS436), 140m/ha	Total Grant Available €/ha
GPC 1 – Unenclosed	€1,605	€535	€600	€2,740
GPC 2 - Sitka spruce / Lodgepole pine	€2,330	€775	€600	€3,705
GPC 3 – 15% Diverse Conifer e.g. Sitka spruce and 15% broadleaves	€2,410	€805	€600	€3,815
GPC 4 – Diverse Conifer e.g., Scots pine, Douglas Fir	€2,785	€925	€600	€4,310
GPC 5 – Broadleaf e.g. sycamore	€3,960	€1,320	€600	€5,880
GPC 6 – Oak	€4,215	€1,405	€600	€6,220
GPC 7 – Beech	€4,215	€1,405	€600	€6,220
GPC 8 – Alder and Birch	€2,695	€900	€600	€4,195
GPC 9- Native Woodland Establishment (oak-birch-holly-hazel)	€4,215	€1,405	€600	€6,220
GPC 10- Native Woodland Establishment (alder-oak woodland)	€3,960	€1,320	€600	€5,880
GPC 11 - Agro-forestry	€4,215	€1,405	€600	€6,220
GPC 12 – Forestry-for-Fibre	€2,410	€805	€600	€3,815

GPC	Annual Premium Rate <10ha	Annual Premium Rate >10ha	Premium Duration (years)
GPC 1 – Unenclosed	€185	€190	15
GPC 2 - Sitka spruce/ Lodgepole pine	€440	€450	15
GPC 3 – 15% Diverse Conifer e.g. Sitka spruce and 15% broadleaves	€510	€520	15
GPC 4 – Diverse Conifer e.g., Scots pine, Douglas Fir	€590	€600	15
GPC 5 – Broadleaf e.g. sycamore	€605	€620	15
GPC 6 – Oak	€645	€660	15
GPC 7 – Beech	€645	€660	15
GPC 8 – Alder and Birch	€605	€620	15

GPC	Annual Premium Rate <10ha	Annual Premium Rate >10ha	Premium Duration (years)
GPC 9- Native Woodland Establishment (oak-birch-holly-hazel)	€665	€680	15
GPC 10- Native Woodland Establishment (alder-oak woodland)	€665	€680	15
GPC 11 - Agro-forestry	€645	€660	15
GPC 12 – Forestry-for-Fibre	€510	€520	15

Forestry Sector

394. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated additional cost to the Exchequer based on 2017 participation and planting rates to implement a proposal (details supplied) over a full year. [20051/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current forestry programme does not differentiate between a “farmer” and “non-farmer” but targets funding at all landowners who wish to convert lands to forestry. It’s important to note that the non-farmer category also includes recently retired farmers and the family members of existing farmers. I have no plans to change the current situation and will continue to pay the same premium under the current programme to all landowners to ensure that the maximum amount of land is available for afforestation.

In relation to the Deputy’s proposal to re-introduce the farmer premium differential and using his example to increase the premium for GPC3 from the premium rate of €510 in 2017 to €850/ha for farmers, the additional estimated expenditure for GPC3 would be approximately €843,200 per year.

Forestry Sector

395. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated additional cost to the Exchequer based on 2017 participation and planting rates on implementing a proposal (details supplied) over a full year. [20052/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Most productive marginal land is already eligible for planting and many farmers avail of the generous grants and premiums on offer to plant this land. There are some restrictions on planting land in designated areas and other environmentally sensitive areas. There is also a restriction on the proportion of unenclosed land, Grant Premium Category 1(GPC1) planted, capped at 20% in any one application.

My Department paid for planting of 48.80 hectares of land under GPC1 in 2017. Based on that level of planting, the Deputy’s proposal to increase grants and premiums for this category would result in an increase in expenditure of approximately €60,000 per year.

Forestry Data

396. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

estimated additional cost to the Exchequer based on 2017 participation and planting rates on implementing a proposal (details supplied) over a full year. [20053/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Environmental Requirements for Afforestation guidelines require that up to 15% of the afforestation site must be treated with particular regard to biodiversity, comprising a combination of open spaces and retained habitats and this includes setbacks beside habitats, watercourses, setbacks beside public roads and archaeological monuments that are not planted.

The land set aside as Areas for Biodiversity Enhancement or ABEs, as they are known, are fully eligible for grant and premium payments. Increasing level of ABEs to 35% would not result in additional expenditure for the exchequer but would result in fewer trees being planted which would have a detrimental impact on the targets in the Forestry Programme.

It would also result in lost income for landowners planting their land forest as it would reduce the quantity of timber available for harvesting by up to 20%. I therefore have no plans to change this current requirement.

Departmental Expenditure

397. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount allocated and expended, respectively, on forestry schemes in each of the years 2014 to 2017, in tabular form. [20054/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The amount allocated and expenditure incurred by my Department on forestry schemes for each of the years 2014 to 2017 is indicated in the table.

Allocation for Afforestation Scheme and Forestry Support Schemes	(million)
2014	109.77
2015	109.56
2016	111.68
2017	109.05
Expenditure on Afforestation Scheme and Forestry Support Schemes	
2014	108.09
2015	102.70
2016	102.02
2017	99.51

Dairy Sector

398. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps she is taking to address labour shortages in the dairy sector; and the way in which this deficit will be met in order to reach Food Wise 2025 targets. [20101/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A shortage of labour has been building up in certain sub-sectors of the Irish agri-food sector in recent times. The Deputy is correct to refer to the dairy sector, but labour pressures also exist in the horticultural and meat processing sectors. While the reasons for the shortages are varied, they

include the significant value added growth expansion of the sector in recent years; the growth in the economy as a whole which has meant we are now approaching full employment; and also economic and associated employment growth in other EU countries which have traditionally supplied workers for the Irish agri-food sector.

I am aware of the impact that these labour shortages are having, and I am committed to helping the sectors involved find appropriate solutions.

In relation to the dairy sector, last November I established a multi stakeholder group with a view to ensuring that Irish dairying has access to the human capital it requires to realise its ambitions. I expect that this Group will finalise an action plan in the coming weeks which will address the short and medium term labour issues facing the dairy sector. This action plan will make an important contribution to alleviating the labour shortage issue that exists and will be submitted to the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee for information.

In addition to the work of this group, a range of other measures are being pursued by the dairy sector to try to attract and retain labour, including exchanges with New Zealand, enhanced efforts to recruit from within the European economic area, as well as efforts at regional level to engage with, and attract people on the live register, homemakers and drystock farmers to avail of opportunities on dairy farms.

Bioenergy Strategy

399. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has examined the study published by the EU Commission in March 2017, “Optimal Use of Biogas from Waste Stream. An Assessment of the Potential of Biogas from Digestion in the EU beyond 2020”, which highlights that Ireland has the highest potential for biogas production per capita within the EU by 2030 and a potential of 13 TWh/annum forecast; and if he examined rolling out a scheme to increase biogas production from farm waste via co-operatives and the potential costs incurred. [20102/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The agriculture and forest sector has a critical role to play in contributing to our national climate change ambitions, and bioenergy represents a key component of that contribution.

I have noted with interest the study to which the Deputy is referring and this study has been examined by the relevant division in my Department. While the EU study illustrates that small Member States have a large potential to increase their domestic biogas production (in terms of production per inhabitant), these figures are based on accelerated growth scenarios with the upper limits of feedstock potential used.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) in their recent report on “The Assessment of Cost and Benefits of Biogas and Biomethane in Ireland” also highlight that the potential of biogas production could be 35PJ by 2050. This is based on maximum use of grass silage and other resources for anaerobic digestion (AD), which could prove very expensive to mobilise.

I also recognise that there is an opportunity to encourage the utilisation of agricultural waste as an alternative source of energy. I have noted that while it is possible to produce and utilise methane through AD of stored manure (which accounts for only 10% of agricultural methane), academic and industry research suggests that there is the potential for a significant role in the heat and transport sectors for biogas produced by anaerobic digestion, analysis to date would suggest that costs are a significant factor.

Notwithstanding, my Department and the Government recognise that indigenous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets. My Department is committed to working closely with the Department for Communications, Climate Action and Environment which is the lead Department in this area, to ensure that the supply of domestic biomass and residues available in the forest and agriculture sectors are mobilised to support energy generation from a range of bioenergy technologies.

Given renewed interest in this technology and an interest from industry in mobilising biomethane, my Department is also collaborating closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment to consider the potential for anaerobic digestion to contribute to Ireland's significant renewable energy and Green House Gas targets, and promote the development of Ireland's bioeconomy.

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

400. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the body responsible for the upkeep, repair and maintenance of the slipway in Foynes, County Limerick (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20107/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Pursuant to the Fishery Harbour Centres Act 1968 (as amended), this Department is responsible for the management, control and operation of the six Fishery Harbour Centres located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros an Mhíl. In addition, my Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board piers, lights and Beacons Act.

Responsibility for the maintenance and development of Local Authority-owned harbours and piers rests with each individual Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government thereafter.

The slipway referred to in Foynes does not come under the remit of my Department and is registered to a private individual, responsibility for its maintenance and upkeep would appear therefore to rest with the owner or their estate.

That said, it is my understanding the local Council has undertaken to clean the slipway of dangerous material.

Nitrates Action Programme Implementation

401. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the Exchequer funding allocated for the nitrates action programme in each of the years 2018 to 2021; the 2018 funding allocation, by current and capital funding; the number of full- and part-time staff working directly on the programme in his Department; and the annual running costs, including staffing costs, for his Department, in tabular form. [20174/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government is the lead authority for the Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations which gives legal effect to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates Action Programme (NAP).

The Nitrates Directive is one of the Statutory Management Requirements for which my Department inspects 1% of Basic Payment Scheme applicants to ensure compliance with standards.

Significant supports are made available through the Rural Development Programme towards achievement of environmental objectives in climate, biodiversity and water including with the Nitrates Directive. This support amounts to €4 billion over the period 2014-2020. Under GLAS our agri-environmental climate measure in the RDP a significant portion of funding is devoted to water protection measures such as priority access to farmers in high status water areas.

Our Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) provides grant aid of 40% to all farmers and up to 60% to young trained farmers investing in slurry and manure storage facilities and concrete silage slabs etc. The Low Emission Slurry Spreading Scheme has been particularly successful and provides grant support for use of new technology which will increase the value of applied slurries on farms. This leads to reduced nutrient losses and therefore benefit water quality and over 1500 applications have been received to date.

In addition my Department funds the Teagasc Agricultural Catchments Programme (ACP) which is a joint research and advisory programme operated by Teagasc in six agricultural catchments across the country. The scientific findings from the ACP help fulfil Ireland's monitoring and reporting requirements under the EU Nitrates Directive and the EU Water Framework Directive. The findings support key agri-environmental policies and strategies, including the recent review of the NAP and the 2nd cycle of River Basin District Planning under the Water Framework Directive.

The most recent support is a collaborative approach between my Department, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the dairy industry to fund water advisors for farmers to assist in them in meeting water protection standards. This is an important measure as it is a whole of government, whole of sector innovation and an important measure in Ireland's recently published River Basin Management Plan.

The Nitrates, Biodiversity and Engineering (NBE) Division of my Department plays a major role in the development and implementation of policies and operations pertaining to the NAP and Nitrates Derogation, in addition to other responsibilities. Projected expenditure details for the DAFM Nitrates, Biodiversity and Engineering Division for 2018 are as follows:

Number Personnel	21 (Full time equivalents = 19)
Staffing Costs	€1,277,966
Agricultural Catchments Programme	€1,600,000
Total	€2,877,966

For 2019 to 2021 expenditure will rise in line with normal inflation rates.

Departmental Programmes

402. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the Exchequer funding allocated to the sustainability support and advisory programme in each of the years 2018 to 2021; the 2018 funding allocation, current and capital; the number of full- and part-time staff working directly on the programme in his Department; and the annual running costs, including staffing costs, for his Department, in tabular form. [20176/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 'Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme' is an innovative Government/ industry collaborative

initiative and a new approach to achieving improvements in water quality and wider sustainability. It involves the establishment and joint funding between my Department, the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government (DHPLG) and the Dairy Industry of a resource of 30 Agricultural Sustainability Advisors. 20 Advisors are being jointly funded by my Department and the DHPLG.

These Advisors will receive comprehensive training provided by Teagasc to ensure a consistent and unified approach. The Government funded Advisors will be managed by Teagasc's environmental section with oversight provided by both my Department and DHPLG.

This four year programme supports the goals of the Food Wise 2025 strategy, facilitating increased productivity hand-in-hand with a more sustainable sector. The sustainability and efficiency gains will be achieved through improved nutrient management with more targeted use of fertiliser, better farmyard practice, and the development of new approaches to reducing nutrient losses in critical source areas.

The programme has the potential to strengthen delivery of Ireland's obligations under the Water Framework Directive. It is part of a new approach to River Basin Management Planning for the 2018–2021 cycle. This new approach includes the development of a much-strengthened evidence base to understand the full range of pressures affecting water quality and the development of the programmes of measures needed to deliver improvements. Over time, the Programme will also address on-farm climate change and biodiversity strategies

Under the programme, the new team will promote on-farm sustainability best practice to farmers in 190 priority catchments identified by the EPAs in consultation with other Government agencies and Departments. Furthermore the Dairy Co-ops will support sustainability best practice through their structures, promoting best farmyard and nutrient management practice across all their suppliers.

Projected expenditure details for the 20 Sustainability Advisors and 3 Overhead Personnel, being financed by my Department and DHPLG, are as follows:

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Annual Cost €	816,944	1,686,207	1,741,284	1,868,844

Agriculture Schemes

403. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a scheme for farmers to further reduce ammonia and nitrogen emissions following the completion of the projects (details supplied); and if his officials carried out exploratory work in this regard for potential schemes and associated costs. [2017/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The two projects referred to by the Deputy were funded by my Department. The recently completed Sustainable nitrogen fertiliser Use and Disaggregated Emissions of Nitrogen (SUDEN) project generated, for the first time, Irish specific ammonia emission factors for dung and urine deposited by grazing cows. The project also identified that farmers can maintain yields and reduce ammonia loss to the environment by switching from CAN to urea protected with NBPT (urease inhibitor). The research found nitrogen loss to the environment can be reduced substantially by integrating urease inhibitors in high profit grass systems. Following on from this, my Department made an award of further funding for a project titled 'Manipulation and Integration of Nitrogen Emissions (MINE)', which aims to use cutting edge techniques to provide greater understanding of

the processes and factors controlling nitrous oxide emissions.

The LowAmmo project, which is focusing specifically on addressing knowledge gaps in national ammonia emissions data, including measurement, modelling and mitigation of ammonia emissions from livestock housing, grazing depositions and slurry storage, is scheduled to conclude later this year. Data collected will feed directly into the refinement of Ireland's national ammonia inventory. The mitigation options for yards and slurry storage investigated in LowAmmo will also provide valuable data for the future development of abatement options.

Furthermore, we have a whole territory approach to nitrates implementation so all farmers are obliged to abide by nutrient management planning which has many synergies with reducing ammonia due to the efficient use of animal manure. The *Nitrates Action Programme* agreed in December 2017 included a balanced programme of measures supporting the objectives of achieving good water quality while at the same time encouraging sustainable and efficient agricultural practices. The measures in Ireland's derogation take account of the growing numbers of derogation farmers who are farming at intensive stocking rates, and also environmental objectives for water, climate change and ammonia which Ireland must achieve. For example, a new condition for derogation farms has been included in that from 2018, 50% or more of slurry must be applied by 15 June and after that it must be applied by using low emission slurry spreading (LESS) equipment.

Additionally, my Department supports the grant aid for Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) equipment under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme known as TAMS II and supports the application of slurry via LESS equipment as an option in the GLAS agri-environment scheme which significantly reduces the ammonia losses from slurry.

Officials from my Department are also engaging with the Department of Communications Climate Action and the Environment, who are the lead Department on air quality issues, on the development of a National Clean Air Strategy.

Fisheries Protection

404. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for a by-law (details supplied) in regard to the reduction of fishing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20021/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Kyne): I understand the Deputy is referring to the annual suite of regulations to facilitate management of commercial salmon fisheries by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). I recently finalised these regulations ahead of the opening date for the commercial season on 12 May 2018. These regulations are concerned with conservation of each genetically unique river stock and apply to those rivers with a harvestable surplus of fish on which it is intended to open commercial fisheries.

District Committees, which include representatives of both the angling and commercial fishing sectors, meet annually to make recommendations on how any surplus on each river is to be allocated between anglers and commercial fishermen. These recommendations are notified to the relevant Regional Director of IFI to assist informed decision making.

The commercial salmon fishing season has normally closed on 31 July for many years – for a small number of years this was extended into August for some fisheries on the basis that the full allocation for commercial fishermen was not being taken by the closing date.

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In 2018, the established closing date of 31 July is being set in an effort to protect the important late running cohort of salmon - the traditional 'autumn run'. Salmon catch is limited by quota and there is a strong possibility that the quotas will be fully utilised by the commercial nets before that date. In the event that the allocation in any individual fishery is not taken by the closing date the option remains for me to consider an extension to the season, on a case by case basis.

Broadcasting Sector

405. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to implement the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment to ensure greater investment in independent television production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20040/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I requested the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment to examine the longer term issue of the future funding of public service media. The Committee published their report at the end of November 2017. The findings of the report were debated in the Dáil on 29 March, 2018.

Both Public Service Broadcasters spend millions of euro each year on independently produced programming. This is vital in supporting a vibrant independent sector, including in the regions.

As the Deputy may be aware, Section 116 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that RTÉ make specific amounts available each year for the commissioning of television and radio programmes from the independent production sector. In 2016, it spent €39.6m on independent productions. A total of 719 hours (300 radio, 419 television) were commissioned across a range of programme categories.

In addition, TG4 commissions the majority of its Irish language programmes from independent production companies throughout Ireland. In 2016, the broadcaster spent over €22.5m on independent productions, which was 90% of its annual programme budget for that year.

In order to sustain and increase the amount spent on independent productions, additional resources are required for public service broadcasting. This means that the current evasion rate in respect of the TV licence fee must be addressed and I intend to bring proposals to Government shortly in this regard.

Broadband Service Speeds

406. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that average broadband speeds in parts of Cobh are inadequate and that residents and businesses in so-called blue areas cannot access high-speed broadband. [19923/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband.

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

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

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

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

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

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll-out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

Premises in the Cobh area fall into all of these categories. Individuals can check which category their premises falls into by going to my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie and entering their eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map.

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

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

Where someone living in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would ask you to please encourage them to email my Department at broadband@dccae.gov.ie with their eircode and details of the service providers they have contacted and my officials will respond.

Prior to the roll-out of the State Intervention network, 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 improving. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. A link to a list of the local Broadband Officers can be accessed here <http://www.ruralireland.ie/policies/national-broadband-plan/>

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

407. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

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Environment when the BAI five-year review of public service broadcasting funding report for 2018 to 2022 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20038/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As per Section 124 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) are required to carry out a Review of Public Service Broadcasting every five years. The latest review is for the period 2018-2022 and it is my understanding that this review will be finalised and submitted to my Department shortly.

Once the review has been received, I will bring the report and recommendations made by the Authority to Government. As per Section 124 of the 2009 Act, the Government's response to these recommendations and the Five Year Review will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas and published.

Ministerial Meetings

408. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times he meets the CEOs of the major State companies and agencies under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20076/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's remit includes complex policy areas, oversight of State regulation and service provision across key strategic services such as energy, environment, climate change and public broadcasting, as well as regulation of sectors such as mining and hydrocarbon exploration. In this context there are 6 commercial State bodies, 8 non-commercial State bodies and 3 regulators, under the aegis of my Department.

With regard to the commercial and non-commercial State Bodies, my Department currently oversees the governance of those bodies to ensure they are fully compliant with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and the governance functions included in the statutory framework underpinning individual bodies. My Department also ensures that the State Bodies act in a manner consistent with current Government policy and that compliance obligations, reporting procedures and assurance arrangements are all adhered to. The Department is supported by NewEra in exercising corporate governance functions in respect of the bodies designated under the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act, 2014.

With regard to the regulators, they have all been established on a statutory basis and are independent in the exercise of their respective functions. Appropriate corporate governance arrangements are in place to ensure that the regulators comply with, insofar as applicable and having regard to the binding requirements of EU and national law, the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, related Government policy and all other governance functions within the various statutory frameworks underpinning them.

As a matter for course I, as Minister, meet with the CEO's of the Agencies under the aegis of my Department as the need arises.

Telecommunications Services Expenditure

409. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the annual cost of setting up the broadband and mobile phone task force; the an-

nual costs incurred and total Exchequer allocations made in each year since it was established; the number of part- and full-time civil servants attached to the task force; and the associated annual staff costs in this regard. [20104/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. In July 2016, I established the Taskforce to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

In relation to actual direct spending associated with the Taskforce by my Department, no expenditure was incurred in 2016. In 2017, spending of €6,572.87 can be directly attributed to the Taskforce. This includes €3,834.28 towards the National Stakeholder Forum and €2,738.59 towards the Taskforce stand at the National Ploughing Championships.

To date in 2018, expenses of €580.00 were incurred by my Department in relation to the launch of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017.

There are no Exchequer Allocations associated with the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce from my Department. However, all thirty one local authorities in the State receive an Exchequer Allocation from the Department of Rural and Community Development of €35,000 in order to fund a Broadband Officer. The Broadband Officer is a single point of contact in each local authority, ensuring consistency in engagement with operators and assisting in the roll-out of telecommunications infrastructure.

In terms of staffing costs, three officials in my Department are engaged in managing the Taskforce actions, and do so in the course of their normal duties. A number of other officials and experts from various Departments and State Bodies are working with key stakeholders to assist in the delivery of the actions.

National Mitigation Plan

410. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the term “non-zero emission vehicle” in regard to the commitment in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 encompasses vehicles equipped with a combustion engine regardless of fuel and other propulsion systems which may also be installed, such that no new hybrid propulsion vehicles that include a combustion engine will be sold here after 2030. [20110/18]

411. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale for delaying the ban on sales of non-zero emission vehicles until 2030 in view of the large and accumulating overshoot of carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector relative to EU targets and the temperature goals for the Paris Agreement; and his costed plans for drawing down the corresponding excess carbon dioxide that will be emitted to the atmosphere and that is directly attributable to this delay. [20111/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 410 and 411 together.

Ireland’s first statutory National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July last year, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The purpose of the Plan is to specify the policy measures re-

quired in order to manage Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions at a level appropriate for making progress towards our long-term national transition objective as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as well as to take into account existing EU and international obligations on the State in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Although this first Plan will not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

Building on the National Mitigation Plan, the publication in February of the National Development Plan, will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. Almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. In addition, the National Development Plan allocated a further €8.6 billion for investments in sustainable mobility. This capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

Within the framework of the National Mitigation Plan, the transport sector will need to play a strong role in contributing to our national emissions reduction effort and the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport is working closely with my Department to develop and implement the policies and measures necessary to achieve these emissions reductions.

In May 2017, the National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland was published. It set out the ambition that by 2030 all new cars and vans sold in Ireland will be zero-emissions capable. This ambition was also included in the National Mitigation Plan and was further reinforced by the commitment in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, published in February 2018, that no new non-zero emission vehicles would be sold in Ireland post 2030. Achieving the National Development Plan ambition would require that no new fossil fuel powered cars, including hybrid variants, would be sold in Ireland post-2030.

In order to consider the range of measures and options available to Government to accelerate the uptake of lower emitting vehicles, a dedicated Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce was established. The low emission vehicle transition will be delivered as quickly and as effectively as possible through a combination of implementing the measures outlined in the National Mitigation Plan, the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan; realising the outcomes of the Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce deliberations; and developing new and innovative policy interventions in the years ahead in light of technological and market developments.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

412. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's planned renewable energy system's capacity estimated to be installed here in percentage of the power mix for the years 2030 and 2035. [20113/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of Irish energy policy from now until 2030. It identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050. It does not set out targets for specific renewable technologies; rather it provides a framework to guide policy between now and 2030.

The National Mitigation Plan 2017 restates the Government's commitment to move from a

fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised. Natural gas will continue to play a key role as a transition fuel.

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 sets out clear measures towards decarbonisation, including the upgrading of 45,000 homes every year from 2021 to make them energy efficient, up to 4,500 MW of renewable electricity generation, roll-out of the support scheme for renewable heat, and commitments on electric vehicles and low-emission public transport. However, in the transition, the lowest CO₂ emitting fossil fuel is still required to ensure a safe, secure and competitive path towards sustainability. In addition to this the planned closure of Moneypoint by 2025 and the ending of peat for electricity generation in advance of 2030 will have an positive impact.

In regard to future electricity demand, EirGrid have modelled a number of scenarios in their 2017 publication “Tomorrow’s Energy Scenarios”. Each scenario predicts a different possible future for the generation and consumption of electricity out to 2040. A link to the document is available at

<http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/EirGrid-Tomorrows-Energy-Scenarios-Report-2017.pdf>

Advertising Regulation

413. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a report (details supplied) will be released on the impact of opt-out advertising on the Irish market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20164/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In May 2016 the European Commission published its proposal to review the Audiovisual Media Services Directive which regulates the provision of audio-visual media services in the European Union.

In order to support its participation in the negotiations on the revision of the AVMS Directive, my Department engaged consultancy services in October 2016 to review the impact of ‘opt-out’ advertising on the Irish broadcasting sector. “Opt-out advertising” in this context refers to the practice by certain UK broadcasters of creating a duplicate version of a UK channel and removing the UK advertising and replacing that advertising with advertising targeting Irish audiences. These duplicate channels have a separate licence from OFCOM, the British regulator.

The report has informed Ireland’s position in the negotiations at EU level and it is available to view on my department’s website. It is expected that a final text of the revised AVMS Directive will be produced in Autumn 2018.

Road Network

414. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to develop a bypass for Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19633/18]

415. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to major traffic issues in Carrick-on-Shannon; his plans to develop a

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ring road to deal with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19634/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 and 415 together.

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

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

Taxi Regulations

416. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis registered in each county. [19703/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, which includes wheelchair accessible taxis, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

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

Sports Facilities Provision

417. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding allocated to the large-scale sport infrastructure fund announced by the Minister in his budget 2018 speech for each of the years 2018 to 2020; the amount of this funding he plans to ring-fence for disadvantaged areas; his plans to put safeguards and conditions in place to ensure that the majority of the available funding is used in disadvantaged areas with poor sports facilities as part of the process of his Department drafting terms and conditions for the fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19823/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The recently published National Development Plan (NDP) contains a commitment to establish a new "Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund" (LSSIF) with at least €100 m available over the coming years. My officials have commenced drafting the terms and conditions of the new LSSIF and I note the Deputy's comments in that regard. I would be happy to receive any additional observations that the Deputy may wish to make. My officials have also engaged with relevant stakeholders for views. It is intended that the Fund will be for larger projects where the proposed Government contribution exceeds the amount currently available for individual projects under the Sports Capital Programme.

There is no funding provided for the programme in 2018. The amounts to be provided in 2019 and 2020 will be decided in the context of the annual Estimates for each year respectively.

An announcement in relation to when applications will be accepted will be made once these terms and conditions are finalised.

Brexit Issues

418. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the preparatory work that has been carried out with regard to maintaining the open skies policy following Brexit; the contingency plans in place if no agreement is reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19827/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit and its potential implications for Ireland are being managed on a whole-of-government basis. My Department is represented on all relevant cross-Departmental coordination structures, and an internal Departmental Committee on Brexit meets regularly. The Department also consults regularly with the aviation regulatory bodies and industry stakeholders through the National Civil Aviation Development Forum.

Contingency planning in relation to Brexit at both a national 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.

The European Commission is also contingency planning on this basis and in the context of contingency planning for a “disorderly Brexit” has put forward the possibility of a so-called ‘bare-bones’ EU-UK air services agreement (traffic rights & safety) and/or the possibility of unilateral EU measures. Ireland strongly favours an EU level solution to these issues such as those being looked at by the Commission.

The Government has been clear that its approach to preparing for Brexit is aimed at minimising the impact of Brexit on our trade and economy and an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Ireland has been a long standing supporter of open skies policies and this certainly remains the case in the context of Brexit.

Harbour Authorities

419. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the 2015 amendment to the Harbours Act 1996 provides for retrospective application in that it covers the period from 1997 when the port companies were corporatised; the reason the lengthy retrospective application was included in the 2015 amendment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19880/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Harbours Act 2015 was signed into law by the President on the 25 December 2015 and commenced from that date.

Harbour Authorities Membership

420. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the circumstances in a matter (details supplied); the reason an elected official whose election was validated by the returning officer and company secretary has been refused letter of appointment as a director of a port company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19881/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Harbours Act 2015 introduced changes in legislation in line with Government policy and to strengthen and

improve corporate governance arrangements for port company boards, including the introduction of a 10-year limit on the period served by a director of a port company.

Section 30(6) of the Harbours Act 1996, as substituted by section 39 of the Harbours Act 2015, provides that a person shall not serve as a director of a port company for a period that is longer than 10 years in total. This applies equally to all directors of port companies, including employee directors.

The Harbours Act 2015 was signed into law on 25 December 2015. Accordingly the 10-year limit applies to all directors of port companies from that date forward, including serving directors at the time of enactment.

In 2017, employee director elections were held in a number of the port companies. In the case of the port referenced by the Deputy, the employee who went forward for election was an existing employee director and had already served as an employee director for 10 years and was therefore not eligible to be appointed for a further term of office. My Department advised the company that the 10-year limit applies to all directors including employee directors and the process for election of an employee director was reheld. A number of candidates went forward and a new employee director is now in place. All employee director positions in port companies have been filled and no vacancies will arise for a number of years.

Harbour Authorities Staff

421. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is apparently no time limit on the term of a CEO as a director of a port company here even though their employment contracts according to the Department of Finance must not exceed seven years (details supplied); the reason this inconsistency exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19882/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In the case of the State commercial ports sector, section 36 of the Harbours Act 1996 provides that CEOs shall also be appointed to the board as an *ex officio* (often referred to as an executive) director of the relevant company for the duration of their term of office as a CEO. I would note that the appointment of a CEO as an *ex officio* director of a company is a standard feature of most commercial organisations; however, that appointment is limited to the duration of their contracted term of office as CEO.

Harbour Authorities Membership

422. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason an anomaly exists in the election of worker directors of ports here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19883/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): To strengthen the position of the Boards of Port Companies, the Harbours Act 2015 introduced changes in legislation in line with Government policy and to strengthen and improve corporate governance arrangements for company boards, including the introduction of 10-year limit on the period served by any director, including an employee director, of a port company.

The legislation also introduced certain stated skill sets for company directors.

Section 30(6) of the Harbours Act 1996, as substituted by section 39 of the Harbours Act

2015, provides that a person shall not serve as a director of a port company for a period that is longer than 10 years in total. This applies equally to all directors of port companies, including employee directors.

This provision is also in accordance with good corporate governance and practice as specified in 4.5 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016

In setting an overall limit on the period of directorships, section 30(6) gives more opportunities for other people to register their interest in serving on the boards of port companies. Elections have been held and all employee director positions in port companies are currently filled and no vacancies will arise for a number of years.

Harbour Authorities Membership

423. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether elected worker directors play an important role in the governance of tier one commercial port companies; and his further views on whether the number of elected worker directors on the boards of State-owned tier one port companies should be restored to the level set out in the Harbours Act 1996 from one to two in order to reflect the importance attached to the role of worker democracy in State-owned ports and to bring these entities into line with representative levels established in other successful commercial State companies. [19884/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In line with the Ports Policy Statement 2005, the Harbours (Amendment) Act 2009 reduced the total number of directors serving on a port company board from 12 to 8. This was in recognition of the need for smaller, more focussed boards which were clearly aligned, on an individual member level, solely on the achievement of the commercial objectives and wellbeing of the port company. In tandem with smaller, more focussed boards being put in place the allocation of one employee director on each board was more appropriate.

Section 30 of the Harbours Act 1996, as substituted by Section 39 of the Harbours Act 2015 maintains this provision and provides that an election of an employee director shall only be held where the average number of its employees is expected to exceed 30 in an accounting year.

Employee directors play an important role and make a valuable contribution to the governance of our tier one port companies. They provide a unique insight and add to the diverse skill sets required. In line with the legislation all employee director positions in port companies have currently been filled and no vacancies will arise for a number of years

Motor Tax

424. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce a mechanism in the context of motor tax that provides for a refund of funds and or transfer of motor tax to another vehicle in instances whereby a person disposes of or sells a vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19945/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the current motor tax system, motor tax remains with a vehicle on transfer of ownership and the vehicle remains taxed until the validity of the existing tax disc expires.

A motor tax disc is vehicle specific, with the registration number and other details pertaining to the vehicle printed on it. This ensures that the disc relates only to a particular vehicle and

prevents the tax disc being transferred to vehicles other than the one that has been taxed.

There would be administrative and cost impacts attaching to any system of returning motor tax discs on change of ownership, issuing refunds to the seller and issuing new tax discs with a new registration number and vehicle particulars. These impacts would increase if the tax class (and thereby the motor tax rate) of the replacement vehicle was not the same as the original vehicle.

There are no plans to review the mechanism currently in place. It is open to the seller of a vehicle to manage their motor tax affairs to minimise the residual motor tax upon sale of the vehicle, including through the availability of quarterly or half yearly motor tax options. Further, the value of the residual motor tax can be factored into the price the vehicle is traded for.

Cycling Facilities Provision

425. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts being made to progress the greenway infrastructure in County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19956/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department awarded funding of almost €4 million to Kerry County Council in 2014 for the development of the South Kerry Greenway from Glenbeigh to Renard. Given the specific engineering challenges and potential land acquisition and other costs associated with delivering the South Kerry Greenway, the funding currently allocated to the project will not be sufficient to provide for its construction. However, Kerry County Council (KCC) have continued to work on the planning, design and environmental assessment of the greenway and are due to have a pre-planning consultation with An Bord Pleanála in the coming weeks. It is intended following the completion of that process that a formal application for planning approval for the South Kerry Greenway will be submitted.

My Department does not currently have an open call for greenways funding and is therefore not considering any other greenway proposals at present. KCC submitted proposals for both the North Kerry Line and Tralee Fenit (Phase 1) greenways under the National Cycle Network 2014-2016 funding programme and while no funding was awarded under that programme the Tralee-Fenit proposal was subsequently awarded €345,000 under the Government Stimulus package 2014.

As you will be aware my Department is currently developing a Strategy for the future development of greenways which I aim to publish in Q2 2018. This Strategy will provide a long term vision and framework upon which Ireland's greenways can be planned in a strategic manner. The Strategy will also, among other things, seek to address the challenges experienced in delivering the South Kerry Greenway and will provide guidance to all local authorities wishing to avail of funding under future funding calls.

Cycle to Work Scheme Data

426. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the latest figures for persons cycling to work; the amount the bike to work scheme costs to run; and if he has carried out a cost-benefit analysis of the scheme. [20112/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of peo-

ple cycling to work has steadily increased in recent years. The most recent Census figures compiled by the Central Statistics Office show 56,837 people cycling to work, school or college nationally in 2016 increasing from 39,803 in 2011, which represents an increase of 43%.

The Canal Cordon Count collected by Dublin City Council provides data on the number of cyclists who pass the canal cordon in Dublin between 7.00am and 10.00am; it shows that the numbers cycling increased from 10,893 in 2015 to 12,089 in 2016 an increase of 11%. Looking at the cordon count data over a 10-year period, shows growth from 4,839 people cycling in 2006 to 12,089 in 2016 - an increase of 150% over that period. The 2017 data is expected to be released shortly and I would be confident that the 2017 data will continue to report an upward trend in cycling numbers.

The “Bike to Work” scheme to which the Deputy refers is a very attractive incentive which encourages more people to enjoy the benefits of cycling whilst playing an increasing role in relieving traffic congestion. As the Deputy may be aware, this scheme is a tax incentive arrangement, and therefore is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and governed by tax legislation and tax policy which are matters for my colleague the Minister for Finance.

Sexual Offences Data

427. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases of alleged sexual abuse of children in foster care by a person or persons in the home that have been reported to the HSE in each year in the past decade; the policy of the HSE for dealing with such reports; if An Garda Síochána was informed in each case; if the policy is for the children to be removed from the home on foot of an allegation being made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2011/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is of an operational nature, I have asked Tusla to request figures from the local areas that may be of assistance and to reply to the Deputy directly. I would note that Tusla was set up in January 2014, and prior to this the services were provided by the Health Service Executive.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has a clear protocol for managing concerns or allegations about foster carers which is procedure which is the ‘Interim Protocol for managing concerns and allegations of abuse or neglect against Foster Carers and Section 36 (relative) Foster Carers’. This guidance is in place nationally. A revised national procedure and guidance is expected to be available this year.

The guidance is underpinned by the Child Care Act 1991, as amended, the foster care regulations, Children First guidance and the National Standards for Foster Care. All foster carers are mandated reporters under Children First Act 2015.

When an allegation of abuse is made, immediate action is taken to protect any child or children who may be at immediate risk. All steps taken are informed by the best interests and safety of the children involved. Under Children First, all referrals involving child sexual abuse are referred by Tusla to An Garda Síochána.

Sexual abuse allegations are the most serious form of concerns that are raised against foster carers. An allegation regarding a child in foster care is investigated by the Child Protection Social Work Team. The link social worker for the foster carers does not investigate the allegation however a notification is made to An Garda Síochána, as it would be for any referral where abuse is suspected or confirmed.

Sexual abuse is often a secretive act, and sometimes even those closest to the child won't know until the child feels they can disclose what is happening. Each case is unique and all the facts must be looked at to make sure that the child is safe from harm or abuse.

It is often necessary to consider if a child should be moved from the foster home in order to keep them safe. However, in some cases the person who is in or who has access to the foster home and who may be posing the risk to the child can be removed. It may, then, be assessed that the child could remain in the foster home if an effective safety plan can be put in place and there are no other reasons for the child to be moved from the home. The child involved is interviewed and this is included as part of the assessment. This is done sensitively by trained social workers, who moderate their approach according to the child's ability to discuss the events. The commitment and ability of the foster carers to protect the child is also assessed. A key element of a good safety plan is regular monitoring. If a safety plan is not appropriate given the circumstances, an immediate action to remove the child to an alternate placement will take place.

Adoption Legislation

428. **Deputy Joan Burton** 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. [20179/18]

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.

The legislation provides for structured and regulated access to information and tracing services for those affected by adoption. It sets out the information that can be provided, which includes early life information and medical information, and the circumstances in which it can be provided to adopted persons. A key provision in the Bill is that an adopted person aged 18 years or over who was adopted prior to the 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 also provides that a person who was in an informal arrangement where no adoption order was affected and persons whose birth was incorrectly registered can apply for information and tracing services.

My focus is on proceeding with the Bill as quickly as possible, so that we can move to a situation where these new rights and services are available to this cohort of people. My officials are currently actively engaged in drafting Committee Stage amendments to address issues raised in the debate to date and I hope to progress the Bill as soon as possible.

CLÁR Programme

429. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the level of CLÁR funding which will be made available under each strand in 2018; the level of funding under each strand which was granted in 2016 and 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19726/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant lev-

els of depopulation. The programme was originally launched in October 2001 and closed for applications in 2010. I re-opened the programme in 2016. In 2016 and 2017 my Department approved and funded 900 projects under CLÁR.

I launched the 2018 CLÁR programme on 15th March, with an indicative allocation of €5 million for qualifying projects under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures (€2 million)

Measure 2: Play Areas/ MUGAs (€2 million)

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure (€1 million)

The allocation for each measure is indicative and may vary depending on the number and quality of applications received under each strand.

The closing date for applications under CLÁR 2018 was 30th April and in excess of 400 applications were received. My Department is currently assessing all of the applications received and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects in the coming weeks.

The following tables outline the level of funding approved under each measure under CLÁR in 2016 and 2017.

CLÁR 2016

Measures	Funding approved 2016
CLÁR Safety Package for Schools/community Facilities Measure	€5,134,250
Outdoor Play Facilities Enhancement Scheme/Support for the development of Multi Use Games (MUGA)	€1,752,496
Local Access Roads Measure	€1,352,120
Total	€8,238,866

CLÁR 2017

Measures	Funding Approved 2017
Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures	€2,722,329
Play Areas Measures	€2,207,676
Targeted Community Infrastructure Needs Measure	€768,875
Emergency Response Measure	€1,213,470
Totals	€6,912,350

CLÁR Programme

430. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when a decision regarding the 2018 CLÁR funding allocations will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19727/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation. The programme was originally launched in October 2001 and closed for

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applications in 2010. I re-opened the programme in 2016. In 2016 and 2017 my Department approved and funded 900 projects under CLÁR.

On 15th March last I launched the 2018 CLÁR programme, with an indicative allocation of €5 million for qualifying projects under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/ MUGAs

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

The closing date for applications under CLÁR 2018 was 30th April and in excess of 400 applications were received. My Department is currently assessing all of the applications received and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects in the coming weeks.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Funding

431. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the SICAP funding received by an organisation (details supplied) in 2016 and 2017. [19750/18]

432. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the SICAP funding received by an organisation (details supplied) in 2016 and 2017. [19751/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 431 and 432 together.

SICAP funding is allocated to the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) via the Local Authorities. The Local Authorities, on behalf of the LCDCs, issue the funding to the contracted SICAP Programme Implementers.

No SICAP funding was provided to the organisations in question in 2016 and 2017. Supports to the groups referenced transferred in 2015 from the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to the Department of Justice and Equality.

Community Development Initiatives

433. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding issued to each county via the community development programmes LDSIP, LCDP and SICAP on a yearly basis since 2008, in tabular form. [19890/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I would like to refer the Deputy to the replies to PQ17873/18 (Question No 554) of 24 April 2018, which sets out the LDSIP and CDP funding for the period 2008 and 2009, PQ11821/18 (Question No 907) of 20 March 2018, which sets out the LCDP funding for the period 2010 - 2017 and PQ13350/18 (Question No 274) of 22 March 2018, which sets out SICAP funding for the period 2015 to 2018 in the requested format.

RAPID Programme

434. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the

funding for the RAPID programme in each of the years 2007 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19910/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The following table sets out funding provided under RAPID from 2007 to 2017. The original RAPID programme was closed to applications from 2011 onwards. Spend in the years from 2011 to 2016 reflects my Department's contractual commitments under existing RAPID projects, mainly under the Sports Capital Scheme.

In 2017, a recast RAPID programme was launched. The spend in 2017 includes expenditure relating to contractual commitments under the original RAPID programme, funding for the new recast RAPID programme, and funding which was ring fenced for the Dublin North East Inner City area.

Year	Outturn - €'000s
2007	6,873
2008	9,578
2009	10,406
2010	6,067
2011	2,269
2012	3,062
2013	261
2014	170
2015	317
2016	32
2017	4,962
Allocation	
2018	6,000

In 2017, the total funding allocation under the RAPID subhead was €5 million. Of this, under the new recast RAPID programme each of the 31 Local Authority areas received an allocation of €64,500. Separately, €2.5 million was ring fenced for the Dublin North East Inner City area. In addition, €0.5 million (of the €5 million total) was allocated to honour legacy commitments under the original RAPID programme.

For 2018, the budget available for the recast national RAPID programme is €2 million. In addition, there are provisions in 2018 for €3.5 million relating to the Dublin North East Inner City area and €0.5 million for legacy commitments relating to the original RAPID programme.

My Department is currently reviewing the recast RAPID Programme to facilitate improvements for 2018. Any changes will be communicated to stakeholders on the announcement of the 2018 scheme.

CLÁR Programme

435. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding for the CLÁR programme in each of the years 2007 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19911/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant lev-

els of depopulation. The programme was originally launched in October 2001 and closed for applications in 2010.

I re-opened the programme in 2016 and launched further calls for proposals in 2017 and 2018. The amounts allocated in each of the years 2016 to 2018 under the CLÁR programme are provided on Table 1. The closing date for CLÁR 2018 was 30th April. I hope to be in a position to announce the successful 2018 CLÁR projects in the coming weeks following the assessment of all proposals received.

Table 1 - Allocations under CLÁR 2016-2018

Year	Allocation
2016	€8,238, 866
2017	€6,912,350
2018	€5,000,000 (indicative)

The draw-down of funding allocated under the CLÁR programme can straddle more than one calendar year. Table 2 shows the details of payments made under CLÁR for each of the years from 2007 to date. Payments made in the period 2010 to 2016 were in respect of legacy projects.

Table 2 - Payments made under the CLÁR programme from 2007 to 2018:

Year	Amount paid
2018 to date	€695,144
2017	€5,059,579
2016	€8,293,463
2015	0.00
2014	€50,747
2013	€105,950
2012	€91,077
2011	€348,265
2010	€5,722,915
2009	€13,598,247
2008	€24,178,471
2007	€21,329,361

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Funding

436. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the total funding for the SICAP programme in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19912/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. SICAP funding for the years 2015 to 2017 is set out in the following table. The 2018 full year allocation is €38.028 million.

2015	2016	2017	2018 (paid to date)
28,038,175	37,441,230	37,441,230	17,714,849

Community Services Programme

437. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there are grants available in relation to the establishment of community halls in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19946/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that funding is available through a number of schemes run through my Department to support the management, and development, of community centres, respectively.

The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Such services include community owned, or community managed, buildings and facilities that are used for community benefit, including community centres. CSP funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions, with €32,000 per annum provided for a manager and €19,033 per annum for each full-time equivalent position.

Capital funding may be available under my Department's LEADER Programme to develop or renovate a community centre. LEADER is a multi-annual EU co-funded programme to support rural development. Ireland has an allocation of €250 million under the programme over the period 2014-2020, including both national and EU funding. LEADER is delivered through Local Action Groups in 28 rural areas around the country.

In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy in the area concerned, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

The decision to approve a project, or otherwise, is a matter for the Local Action Group in the relevant area. Applications for funding can be made directly to the relevant Local Action Groups. Contact details for all Local Action Groups are available on my Department's website www.drcd.gov.ie/rural/development/leader

The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 27 April with an allocation of €15million secured in Budget 2018. This follows an allocation of €21.6million to projects in towns and villages across rural Ireland which I announced in October 2017.

This year I am again placing an emphasis on projects that can demonstrate strong economic benefits for towns, villages and their environs. As in previous years, Local Authorities are invited to submit applications to the Department for consideration. Local Authorities will be required to advertise for expressions of interest from towns and villages in their area and proposals to develop a community or sports hall may be considered if the application displays a strong economic benefit to the community and falls within the criteria of the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. Local Authorities will select a number of projects for development into detailed proposals and can submit up to 12 applications to the Department.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

438. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be provided to Louth County Council and ring-fenced to further develop the Great Eastern Greenway to extend it south of Carlingford and to Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19971/18]

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

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Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. The scheme was implemented in 2016 and 2017 and has facilitated the development of greenways, blueways, walks and other trails across the country.

In 2017, funding of €8,500 was approved under the scheme for improvements to the Carlingford to Omeath portion of the Great Eastern Greenway. I plan to launch the 2018 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme in the coming weeks. While details of the scheme have yet to be finalised, it may provide an opportunity for an application to be made for funding for the further development of the Greenway. The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme operates on a competitive bid basis and all applications will be assessed on their merits against the scheme criteria.

CLÁR Programme

439. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an application for CLÁR funding submitted by an association (details supplied) in County Cork; when final decisions on 2018 applications will be made public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20033/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant levels of depopulation.

I launched the 2018 CLÁR programme on 15th March last, with an indicative allocation of €5 million for qualifying projects under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/Multi-Use Games Areas

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

The closing date for CLÁR 2018 was 30th April. More than 400 applications were received in total by my Department. An application does not appear to have been received in respect of the association referred to by the Deputy. However, if the Deputy wishes to provide me with further information, I will look further into the matter.

My officials are currently assessing all applications received under the 2018 CLÁR programme and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful 2018 CLÁR projects in the coming weeks.

CLÁR Programme

440. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an application for CLÁR funding submitted by an association (details supplied) in County Cork; when final decisions on 2018 applications will be made public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20034/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): CLÁR is a targeted capital investment programme for rural areas which have experienced significant lev-

els of depopulation.

I launched the 2018 CLÁR programme on 15th March last, with an indicative allocation of €5 million for qualifying projects under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/Multi-Use Games Areas

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

The closing date for CLÁR 2018 was 30th April. I can confirm that an application was received in respect of the group referred to by the Deputy. The group is based in Co. Sligo.

More than 400 applications were received in total by my Department and my officials are currently assessing these proposals. I hope to be in a position to announce the successful 2018 CLÁR projects in the coming weeks, following the completion of the assessment process.

Disability Support Services

441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether there are enough supports for a person (details supplied); if not, if additional supports will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19707/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department provides a wide range of income and employment supports for people with a disability who have the capacity to work and wish to do so. The Department's Intreo service provides employment supports for people with disabilities who wish to engage with the service on a voluntary basis. Engagement with the Intreo service and through that the EmployAbility service (see below) may help in identifying appropriate supports and services for the person concerned.

Such supports available include, for example, the Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Employability service (a nationwide service, funded by and delivered on behalf of the department: that provides an employment support service for people with a health condition, injury, illness or disability and a recruitment advice service for the business community to support such jobseekers).

In addition, people who transfer to Education and Training Board (ETB) further education and training (FET) courses are paid a FET allowance of the same amount as their DA payment which is suspended for the period of training. The rules that apply to their original social welfare payment also apply to their FET training allowance. Persons with a disability will also retain any secondary benefits, while undertaking an FET intervention, such as the medical card or free travel pass.

The recently published Make Work Pay (MWP) report included a number of recommendations in relation to the disability allowance payment and in supporting people with disabilities to achieve their employment ambitions.

The Government has already implemented a number of the recommendations of the MWP report, while others will require further reflection or consultation with disability groups.

In launching the report, the Government announced that people with a long-term disability

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payment who move off the payment to get a job will retain their free travel pass for a period of five years. This measure goes beyond the recommendation of three years contained within the report and came effect from the launch date of 6th April 2017. The Government has also decided that to accept the report's recommendation to dispense with the requirement that work be of a 'rehabilitative nature' for the disability allowance earnings disregard. When enacted, this will mean that a report from a doctor will no longer required before commencing work and that the focus will be on capacity rather than incapacity.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

442. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive full arrears; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19660/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 20 October 2016.

As a result of an appeals officer's decision, CA was awarded to the person concerned on 1 May 2018 and the first payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 10 May 2018.

Arrears for the period 20 October 2016 to 9 May 2018 will also issue. The person concerned was notified of these details on 1 May 2018.

I hope this clarifies for the matter for the Deputy.

Living Alone Allowance

443. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a living alone allowance allocation being provided to a person (details supplied) is correct; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19662/18]

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 gentleman concerned is in receipt of IP at the maximum weekly personal rate awarded with effect from 13 July 2017. In addition, he was awarded a living alone allowance payable at the weekly rate of €9.00. He is also in receipt of a travel pass, the fuel allowance and the Household Benefits Package which includes electricity allowance and free television licence.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Eligibility

444. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 2125 of 20 June 2017, the outcome of her examination of the decision of the Social Welfare Appeals Office; if the right to full social welfare payments while residing in direct provision will be granted to all nationalities with a refugee declaration, a subsidiary protection declaration or permission to remain; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19699/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The individuals covered by the appeals decisions in question have been paid in full. All other cases continue to be paid in accordance with the relevant legislation.

People living in Direct Provision receive free accommodation, meals, light, heat, laundry and all services normally available in a domestic house. All costs for this are borne by the State. Social welfare legislation allows for the assessment of the value of these services in means tests for social welfare payments. It is not unreasonable that some account be taken of the value of these services, as people living in the community have to meet the equivalent costs from their social welfare payments.

The Deputy may be aware that, following a Supreme Court Judgement in May 2017, the Government has approved to opt in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive. My Department is assessing if this will have implications for the arrangements for people with status in Direct Provision. Once this assessment is complete, the Department will arrange to implement the necessary, if any, changes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

445. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case regarding alleged overpayment by a person (details supplied) in respect of their carer's allowance payment will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19828/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that the person's means must be less than the statutory limit.

It is a further condition for receipt of payment that the carer must furnish such certificates, documents and information affecting their right to payment, that are requested by an officer of my department and the person concerned must notify the department of any change in circumstances which affect their right to payment.

During the course of a review of entitlement, it was discovered that the person concerned had not fully disclosed her means to the Department and to date she has not provided documentation that was requested from her by a social welfare inspector (SWI).

On 18 April 2018 it was decided that the person concerned was not entitled to CA from 11 September 2014 to 1 November 2017 and that she must refund the CA amounting to €38,941.00 paid to her during that period.

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She was also notified of the reason for this decision and of her right of review and appeal.

If the person concerned furnishes the outstanding documentation, the matter will be reviewed and, if necessary, returned to the SWI.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

446. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a carer's allowance submitted in the name of a person (details supplied) was received; when a final determination will be made on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19876/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for (CA) was received from the person concerned on 13 September 2017.

Additional information in relation to the person's means which was not submitted with the application as is required, has been requested by a deciding officer on 1 May 2018.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

447. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19930/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 7 December 2017.

Additional information in relation to the person's means was requested by a deciding officer on 2 May 2018.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

448. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19937/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

449. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which it can transpire that between combined contributions from Ireland and the United Kingdom and being only short 19 contributions from the full amount required for a full pension, a person (details supplied) is only receiving a €10 pension per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19943/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a total of 129 reckonable paid contributions. A minimum of 520 contributions is required for entitlement to standard state pension (contributory) and a minimum of 260 contributions is required for entitlement to a mixed insurance pro-rata pension.

Under European Union regulations, a person's social insurance record in one or more EU countries can be combined with their Irish social insurance record to determine entitlement to a pro-rata pension. A deciding officer has decided that the person concerned is eligible for an EU (mixed insurance) pro rata state pension (contributory), based on their Irish full and modified rate social insurance contributions, together with their EU social insurance contributions. The rate payable is calculated based on the proportion of Irish full-rate social insurance contributions to the person's total social insurance contributions.

EU pro-rata pension entitlement is calculated by firstly establishing the person's theoretical pension entitlement, by treating all the contributions as Irish and dividing that number by their number of years from start to end of employment. The person concerned has a total of 1,644 contributions (their Irish and EU contributions combined) over a 43 year period. This gives them a yearly average of 38. This gives them a theoretical weekly rate of pension entitlement (if all contributions were Irish) of €225.80.

As all contributions are not Irish, their EU pro-rata pension entitlement is calculated by multiplying their theoretical rate (of €225.80) by the number of their Irish contributions and dividing it by the number of their total contributions. In this case, the person concerned has 164 paid (and credited) Irish contributions, which, multiplied by €225.80 (the theoretical rate) and divided by 1,644 (the total number of their contributions), results in a theoretical EU pro-rata pension entitlement of €22.53. This rate is then multiplied by 164 (the number of paid and credited contributions) and divided by 522 (the total full-rate paid Irish and UK contributions). Rounded up, this gives a pro rata pension entitlement of €7.10 per week. Following the budget increase of 30 March 2018, this amount increased to €10.00 per week.

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The greater the number of Irish contributions paid by a person, the higher their weekly rate of Irish EU pro-rata pension entitlement. In many cases a person is also entitled to a second (or more) pro-rata pension entitlement from other countries based on their social insurance contributions paid outside Ireland.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

450. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20011/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a person(s) in need of full-time care and attention.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 30 January 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 3 May 2018 and the first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 4 May 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 25 April 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

451. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20019/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 8 February 2018.

On 25 April 2018 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on his DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

452. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a fish assist application by persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20025/18]

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

person concerned made an application for Fish Assist on 3 May 2018. The claim is currently with a Deciding Officer and the customer will be notified of the outcome as soon as possible.

Social Welfare Appeals

453. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20026/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The details supplied have been brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer who is dealing with this case.

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 Applications

454. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20055/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a person(s) in need of full-time care and attention.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 3 May 2018 and the first payment has issued to her nominated bank account.

Arrears of benefit due from 5 April 2018 to 9 May 2018 have also issued.

The person concerned was notified on 3 May 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Contingency Planning

455. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount of funds set aside on an annual basis for contingent liability for the past ten years to date in 2018; the way in which it is determined the amount that is forecast to be needed for contingent liability; if she carries out an actuary analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability; if she conducts a risk assessment in the context of contingent liability; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20065/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recognises and accounts for contingent liabilities in accordance with generally accepted accounting standards. The international accounting standard (IAS.37) defines a contingent liability as:

(a) A possible obligation that arises as from past events and whose existence will be confirmed only by the occurrence or non- occurrence of one or more uncertain future events not wholly within the control of the entity; or

(b) A present obligation that arises from past events but is not recognised because:

(1) it is not probable that an outflow of resources embodying economic benefit will be required to settle the obligation; or

(2) the amount of the obligation cannot be measured with sufficient reliability.

In accordance with Government accounting rules and generally accepted accounting standards my Department does not make an accounting provision but discloses by way of note the detail of contingent liabilities in its annual statutory accounts. These accounts are the Vote 37 Appropriation Account and the Social Insurance Fund Financial Statements, both accounts are subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

My Department does not carry out an actuarial analysis or a formal risk assessment in respect of contingent liabilities. My Department, however as part of its annual estimate process makes provision for all expenditure likely to materialise in each financial period.

My Department also in accordance with section 10 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 carries out an actuarial review of the financial position of the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) every five years for the purpose of determining the extent to which the Fund may be expected, in the longer term, to meet the demands in respect of the payment of social welfare benefits. SIF related expenditure accounts on average for 46% of the Department's annual expenditure. The last review was carried out in 2017 in respect of the period ending 31 December 2015. Upon the completion of each review the report is presented to both houses of the Oireachtas. A copy of the 2015 Actuarial Report is available at: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Actuarial-Review-of-The-Social-Insurance-Fund-31-December-2015.aspx>.

Social Insurance Data

456. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost to the Exchequer of a proposal (details supplied). [20103/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Self-employed workers who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year, are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum annual payment of €500. This provides them with access to the following benefits: State pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory), guardian's payment (contributory), maternity benefit, adoptive benefit, paternity benefit, treatment benefit (from March 2017) and invalidity pension, which was extended to the self-employed from December 2017.

This compares favourably with employees who, in general, are liable to the Class A rate of 4%. In addition their employers are liable to PRSI at the rate of 8.6% on weekly earnings up to and including €376 or at the rate of 10.85% where weekly earnings exceed €376. Accordingly the combined rate of PRSI rate paid in respect of Class A employees is 12.6% or 14.85%, de-

pending on the level of weekly earnings. These Class A employees are entitled to the full range of social insurance benefits.

The issue of extending additional social insurance benefits to the self-employed paying Class S PRSI was considered in the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance fund (SIF) as at 31 December, 2015, which was published on 18 October 2017.

The review found that the combined cost of introducing the invalidity, illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits for Class S contributions is estimated to be €118 million in 2018, rising steadily to €223 million in 2020. By 2025 the projected cost is €413 million and, over the period of the review the cost would rise to €1.3 billion in 2071. These costs assume that the cost of extending invalidity pension to the self-employed builds up steeply for the first 10 years after introduction after which time the scheme is almost at maturity or a steady state.

For the shorter term schemes, illness and jobseeker's benefits, it is estimated that they will reach maturity after 2 years. Projected expenditure on jobseeker's benefit assumes the same incidence rate as prevail in the employed (PRSI Class A) population. While the review assumed that entitlement to the extended schemes would commence in January 2018, a commencement date of January 2019 would have similar results. Detailed costings of the extension of invalidity pension (entitlement was extended in December 2017) and illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits are contained in the following table.

Year	Invalidity Pension	Illness Benefit	Jobseeker's Benefit	Carer's Benefit	Total € million
2019	30	40	45	2	118
2020	59	54	58	3	173
2021	87	72	60	4	223
2022	125	88	63	5	281
2023	152	94	67	5	317

I hope this clarifies the matter.

State Pensions

457. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can buy voluntary contributions to make it up to 520 contributions for a State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20105/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The legislation governing voluntary contributions is contained in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 and Statutory Instrument 312/1996.

The acceptance criteria for the voluntary contributions scheme currently requires applicants

- To submit an application within 60 months (5 years) of the end of the year in which they last paid, or were credited with a social insurance contribution
- To have a minimum of 520 compulsory paid contributions prior to application

According to the records of my Department, the person concerned last paid compulsory PRSI in 1980 and has a total of 491 reckonable contributions.

In the circumstances, she cannot be admitted as a Voluntary Contributor, as a considerably

longer period of time has elapsed beyond the prescribed 60 month limit and she has paid less than the required 520 compulsory PRSI contributions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

458. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to correspondence (details supplied) regarding a pension scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20122/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): While it is not appropriate for me to comment on an individual pension scheme, I am aware of recent announcements regarding the Irish Life pension scheme and plans to close the scheme to future accrual. Neither I nor the Pensions Authority has the power under legislation to intervene to compel an employer to continue to make contributions to a scheme. Even where a scheme is closed to new members or to future accrual of benefits, the sponsoring employer role continues in relation to that scheme.

Almost all Irish defined benefit schemes have a rule that allows the employer to cease contributions, usually after a notice period. Currently there is no legislative obligation on the employer to make contributions and no further liability on the employer where contributions cease. Neither is there an obligation on the employer to give notice to members or to consult in advance of ceasing contributions.

However, in the case where a restructuring of benefits is proposed, the employer and the trustees of a pension scheme are required to notify scheme members, beneficiaries and the authorised trade unions. Furthermore, changes made to the Occupational Pension Schemes (Section 50 and 50B) Regulations in 2015 require trustees to also notify groups representing the interests of pensioners and deferred scheme members in a scheme in such a situation.

The Roadmap for Pensions Reform, which was published recently, details specific measures that will modernise our pension system. It sets out under Strand 4, ‘Measures to Support the Operation of Defined Benefit Schemes’, that the Government is committed to advancing the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017. The purpose of this Bill is to respond to the ongoing difficulties in DB schemes and to increase protections for members as well as encouraging employers to ensure that schemes are well funded and managed.

The general scheme of the Bill, which was published in May 2017, contained a number of key measures relating to DB pension schemes. These proposed provisions will ensure that an employer cannot “walk away” at short notice from the pension scheme it is supporting by providing a 12 month notification period where an employer is seeking to cease making contributions to a scheme. The amendments seek a middle road between the current position where employers can abandon DB schemes and full and immediate debt on employer provisions. The measures will act to support existing provisions in the Pensions Act and will provide for further protection for scheme members’ benefits and enhance employer responsibilities for their schemes.

The amendments also provide for more frequent monitoring of the financial position of schemes and will further provide that, where a scheme is in deficit and a funding proposal has not been put in place in a timely manner, the Pensions Authority may direct steps to be taken to ensure that the scheme meets the funding standard.

It is important to note that if this new legislation is enacted, a scheme will have to give a minimum notice period of twelve months before contributions can be stopped. However, it will not prevent a company from ceasing contributions once the minimum notice period is served provided the scheme meets the Minimum Funding Standard.

These provisions are quite technical and complex. Work to finalise them is at an advanced stage and I hope to be in position to bring forward the amendments at Committee Stage at the end of May or early June. With the cooperation of the Oireachtas, the Government intends to pass this legislation before the summer recess.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

459. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 122 of 1 May 2018, her plans to improve the employment progression for persons that are not active in the labour market under the guiding principal of active inclusion for the period 2018 to 2020 as set out in Pathways to Work 2016-2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20159/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In recent years, the social protection system has undergone significant reforms, moving away from passive income supports to an ‘active inclusion’ approach that seeks to maximise the potential of all working age adults, with appropriate supports and services. In this context, I understand that this question relates primarily to policies related to employment progression for people with disabilities.

In line with commitments under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities and Pathways to Work 2016-2020, my Department has progressively expanded mainstream activation services to cater for people with disabilities. The Intreo service, the Departments integrated employment support service, is central to this process.

People with a disability may, on a voluntary basis, seek an appointment with an employment supports case officer to discuss their employment ambitions and develop a personal progression plan. Staff in Intreo offices have undertaken training to better support persons with disabilities who want to pursue further education, training or work opportunities. While the Intreo service acts as the primary gateway to employment supports, it may also refer those with more complex needs to other bodies for specialist training or employment supports.

For example, with a disability who are job ready and need a level of support to succeed in long-term and sustainable employment can avail of the EmployAbility Service (a nationwide service, funded by and delivered on behalf of the department). The service provides a range of career advice and employment supports to employers and people with a disability, through Job Coaches. Additionally, a new programme ‘Ability’ will commence in Q2 2018. This programme aims to bring young people (aged 15-29) with disabilities, who are not yet job-ready, closer to the labour market through a range of person-centred supports. The programme will be delivered by a range of local providers who specialise in providing supports for people with a disability.

The Make Work Pay Report, published in April 2017, contains a number of recommendations covering a range of Government departments. While the Government has decided to implement some of the recommendations, others require further consultation with disability service providers and stakeholders. These include developing and extending interdepartmental

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and interagency protocols to ensure that the recommendations are reviewed on a regular basis. A number of the report's recommendations, relating to my Department, have already been implemented, namely:

- People with a long-term disability who take up employment will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years

- A fast-track return to Disability Allowance in situations where the employment does not work out.

Furthermore, a number of other recommendations are the subject of on-going work, including:

- The development of a "Ready Reckoner" to calculate the net benefit of a return to work for people on a disability type payment.

- Amending legislation to dispense of the requirement that work must be of a rehabilitative nature

My Department engages regularly with employers to highlight the benefits of employing people with disabilities. It also provides a range of work related supports for employers who recruit and employ people with disabilities, including:

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) that has been designed to increase the likelihood of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market by providing financial incentives to private sector employers;

- The Reasonable Accommodation Fund assists employers to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability or impairment to access employment. Available grants and supports include; the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant, the Personal Reader Grant, the Job Interview Interpreter Grant and an Employee Retention Grant.

- The Employer Information Pack, available on the Department's website (www.welfare.ie), which contains information on services and supports available to people with disabilities and employers.

The Government remains committed to removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities by focusing on ability rather than disability and enhancing potential through education, training and employment.

Mental Health Services Provision

460. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed regarding mental health in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2016/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):
This issue is a matter for my colleague, the Minister of Health

Question No. 461 answered with Question No. 48.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

462. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the new tenant purchase scheme will be launched; the mortgage approval process regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20368/18]

494. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the situation whereby pensioners cannot purchase their homes under the tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20171/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 462 and 494 together.

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.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In determining reckonable income, the income of all tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants, is included, as is the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner/co-habitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them, thus ensuring the appropriate level of discount is applied to the purchase price.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

The financing of any house sold under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is a separate matter from the eligibility criteria for the scheme. If the tenant is deemed eligible under the scheme, he or she may fund the purchase of a house from one, or a combination, of his/her own resources or a mortgage provided by a financial institution or a local authority house purchase loan.

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 has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements.

These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Housing Adaptation Grant

463. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter regarding a housing adaptation grant in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19641/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability assists people with a disability in private houses to have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. While my Department provides funding to local authorities for the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, the detailed administration of the schemes, including the assessment, approval and payment of individual grants to applicants and the assessment of eligible works, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. I understand in the case referred to, the Council has been in recent contact with the applicant in order to assess the project and the likely funding that would apply.

Local Authority Housing Data

464. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated value of a site (details supplied) in Dublin 9; the way in which it is proposed that Dublin City Council will realise the full value of this site in a transaction to develop housing at the location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19642/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The site at Oscar Traynor Road is one of three significant sites being brought forward by Dublin City Council under its Housing Land Initiative (HLI), the aim of which is to ensure the delivery of mixed-tenure homes in the City Council functional area. All three sites under the HLI are identified as Strategic Development and Regeneration Areas (SDRA) within the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022.

Mixed-tenure developments are an important policy objective in Rebuilding Ireland and uphold the principle of sustainable mixed communities, where housing needs are not subject to rigid segregation, based on income levels. They also provide an opportunity to see major sites developed more quickly, and integrated into existing communities and areas.

Oscar Traynor Road is a 17 hectare greenfield site with the potential to yield 640 mixed-tenure homes and the elected members of the City Council have determined that the homes will be provided on the basis of a 30% social, 20% affordable, and 50% private tenure-mix. This mix will help to ensure that the full value of the site will be realised.

The land is being brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging its value to deliver the optimal number of units. The Council is seeking to identify the best qualified economic operator to work in collaboration with the Council to identify the optimal solution for the site, in accordance with the City Development Plan 2016 - 2022; the Oscar Traynor Road Feasibility Study, which has been approved by the elected members; and any other Council requirements; and to deliver it as efficiently as possible.

The Feasibility Study indicates that the full value of the land will be retrieved from the proposed new development. In terms of the publicly funded elements, as with all such construction projects, the development of this site must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework and procurement rules, to ensure greater cost certainty, best value for

money and financial accountability.

This is a priority project for the City Council and it is progressing through procurement with the Prior Information Notice (PIN) published in June 2017 and the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) issued on 9 February 2018. My Department and I remain committed to working with Dublin City Council to ensure that the necessary resources are in place to deliver the mixed-tenure homes planned on what is a key site for the sustainable development of Dublin City.

Question No. 465 answered with Question No. 72.

Planning Issues

466. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of plans to reform the planning laws to have developments such as data centres regarded as strategic infrastructure allowing them to get through the planning process quickly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19685/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am proposing to introduce the necessary legislative steps in the coming weeks to amend the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in order to classify data centres above a certain size threshold as strategic infrastructure developments. This change will mean that applications for planning permission for data centres that meet the scale requirements will be made directly to An Bord Pleanála, thereby streamlining the planning decision-making process for such developments.

I will be tabling the necessary legislative amendment at Seanad Report Stage of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which is presently progressing through the Oireachtas and which recently completed Seanad Committee Stage.

Home Loan Scheme

467. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is a condition that borrowers must have accumulated a deposit of 3% by way of savings as part of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if a record of paying rent is taken into account in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19686/18]

468. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the 10% deposit requirement can be met by a combination of the help to buy scheme and a gift from parents or another family member as part of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme provided all other scheme conditions are satisfied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19687/18]

473. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to reduce the 10% requirement for the new local authority house loan in view of the difficulties facing potential applicants that have been paying high rents and find it difficult to accumulate the required deposit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19873/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 467, 468 and 473 together.

The new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme is designed to enable credit worthy first-

time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank's prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property.

Applicants must provide bank or similar statements (such as post office, credit union etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making an application, clearly showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings should be no less than 3% of the market value of the property. Gifts are permissible up to 7% of the market value of the property, where their source is verified.

Exceptions to the above can be made where an applicant/applicants can clearly demonstrate a consistent and credible record of savings or rent payment through their bank account which at a minimum is equal to -

- In the case of a fixed rate loan, the proposed monthly loan repayment or
- In the case of a variable rate loan, the proposed stress tested monthly loan repayment.

For prospective purchasers of newly-built properties, the availability, through the Revenue Commissioners, of the Help to Buy Initiative for first-time buyers may provide additional assistance to prospective applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

Further information, including a Frequently Asked Questions section, is available on the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website at <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie>.

Register of Electors Administration

469. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on expanding the number of persons that can sign applications for the Supplementary Register of Electors in order to increase access to the register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19704/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Electoral law provides that an application for inclusion in the supplement to the Register of Electors must be signed by the applicant in the presence of a member of An Garda Síochána from the applicant's local Garda station who must first be satisfied to the person's identity before signing, dating and stamping the form. The Garda may request photographic or other identification. Where the applicant establishes in writing that he/she is unable to progress the application in this way, the form can be signed by the applicant in the presence of an official of the registration authority who is satisfied as to his or her identity. Again, photographic or other identification may be required. If neither option is viable due to physical illness or physical disability, the application form must be accompanied by a medical certificate. While electoral law is subject to ongoing review, I have no immediate proposals to extend the current arrangements.

Homeless Persons Data

470. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address issues (details supplied) regarding the miscategorisation of persons in local authority homeless figures. [19742/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Questions Numbers 24 and 25 on today's Order Paper which sets out the position in this matter.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

471. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding for the proposed ring road is dependent on a particular route being selected as part of the Part 8 process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19743/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The purpose of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages for key sites to activate housing delivery. Funding awarded under LIHAF is done on a matched funding basis, where a grant is given for 75% of the costs of the infrastructure and the local authority match funds that grant for the remaining 25%.

In October 2016, Kildare County Council submitted a proposal for funding for enabling infrastructure in Naas. Following a detailed assessment period, a grant agreement was signed in October 2017 and I approved €6m funding for the project consisting of €4.5 million in Exchequer funding and €1.5 million in matched funding from the Local Authority.

The grant agreement specifies the value of the grant to be awarded for the funding of public infrastructure, that it must be spent on a relief road to enable housing delivery, and that there is an associated housing activation target that must be met by the end of 2021.

The exact route of the proposed road is a matter for Kildare County Council and the Part 8 process to determine. As such processes are the reserved function of local authorities, this is not a matter in which I have a role.

However, I note that should a particular route prove more costly than initially estimated, it is not possible to increase the grant that has been awarded, and any extra cost would need to be met by the Council. Similarly, the timelines set for the completion of the infrastructure and for housing activation must continue to be capable of being met. It is a key requirement under LIHAF that this infrastructure must activate housing supply by 2021 at the latest.

Electoral Register

472. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to allow British citizens living here to vote in referenda and presidential elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19749/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Constitution (Article 47.3 and Article 12.2.2) provides that Irish citizens who have the right to vote at Dáil Elections shall have the right to vote at a referendum and at an election for President.

British citizens, who are ordinarily resident in the State and are 18 years or older, may vote at Dáil, European Parliament and local elections if they are entered in the register of electors.

I have no plans to seek to amend the Constitution to give the right to vote in referendums or Presidential elections to non-Irish citizens.

Question No. 473 answered with Question No. 467.

Homeless Accommodation Funding

474. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding received by organisations (details supplied) from his Department and housing authorities in relation to the provision of homeless services in each of the years 2013 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19885/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. My Department does not fund any service directly but provides funding to housing authorities on a regional basis as a contribution towards costs incurred. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.

Details of the funding provided by housing authorities for the years 2013 to 2017 to the main non-governmental organisations towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services are set out in the table. These service providers may also receive other funding from other Government departments and agencies.

Section 10 Funding 2013-2017

*	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Focus Ireland	€5,023,026	€5,550,205	€8,652,047	€7,923,020	€13,887,021
Simon	€5,498,498	€5,255,553	€5,753,690	€6,861,249	€10,010,032
Peter McVer-ry Trust	€2,780,092	€3,368,583	€4,427,450	€6,072,778	€9,636,252
Crosscare	€3,825,715	€4,438,286	€5,842,969	€7,100,364	€7,097,802
DePaul	€2,590,597	€3,278,890	€3,603,390	€3,863,851	€5,508,966

Local Authority Housing Data

475. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses acquired and purchased by Cavan County Council and Monaghan County Council in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19832/18]

476. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses that have been built by local authorities in counties Cavan and Monaghan in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19833/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 476 together.

Details of the number of houses that have been built and acquired by local authorities, in-

cluding in counties Cavan and Monaghan, in each of the years 2013 to 2017 are published and available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> Details relating to delivery in 2018 will be published on a quarterly basis as soon as they are validated.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Eligibility

477. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason a house which is valued within the mortgage to rent thresholds must be discounted to take account of essential repairs and maintenance despite the fact that repairs and maintenance are not required and this is preventing the mortgage broker accepting the sale price; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19907/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme introduced in 2012, where an Approved Housing Body (AHB) indicates an interest in acquiring a property, the AHB will make an offer to purchase the property based on the market value determined by an independent valuation less any known essential repairs that were not taken account of in the valuation process. This means that while the market value will reflect the condition of the property where the repairs are of a cosmetic nature, the valuation does not take account of structural or health and safety issues.

Essential repairs are those repairs necessary to bring the property up to private rental standards as required under the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 17 of 2017) which is a requirement of all properties being provided to social housing tenants.

The condition of the property and the cost of repairs to bring the property up to statutory standards is a factor that may impact on the viability of an AHB purchasing a property. As the households applying for MTR will have been in a position of acute financial hardship, possibly for a number of years, prior to applying for the scheme, they may not have had the means to carry out the necessary repairs on the property. Accordingly, the scheme has to provide a mechanism by which repairs to the property can be funded to bring the property up to the private rental standards and this is done by deducting the costs of repairs from the market value of the property.

I can neither compel an AHB to purchase a particular property nor a lender to sell a particular property. The Housing Agency who administers the scheme on behalf of my Department works closely with AHBs and lenders at all stages of the MTR process and seeks to ensure that MTR cases are dealt with in a fair and efficient manner.

Local Authority Housing Data

478. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new housing commencements anticipated by the end of 2018; the number of such houses for families on local authority housing waiting lists; the extent to which he expects the lists to improve over the next twelve months; the extent to which the problem of homelessness can be dealt with within the period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20078/18]

480. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he expects extra local authority houses to become available in the course of the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20080/18]

481. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress to date regarding his ongoing dialogue with all local authorities with a view to ensuring the immediate implementation of a local authority housing programme sufficient to address the problem of homelessness as well as reducing the existing local authority housing waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20081/18]

485. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the construction and provision of modular housing of a high quality is being utilised with a view to early impact on homelessness and local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20085/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 478, 480, 481 and 485 together.

My Department publishes a range of datasets relating to housing market activity on the statistics section of its website. Details of commencement notices received by each of the 31 local authorities are published as a monthly series, which can be accessed through the following weblink:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-starts>.

The latest Monthly Housing Activity Report (March 2018), which is available on www.rebuildingireland.ie, shows that targeted interventions under Rebuilding Ireland are working. The next Monthly Housing Activity Report will be published shortly.

As regards the outlook for the coming years, the Central Bank in its Quarterly Bulletin (Q2 2018), which is available at the following weblink, <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/quarterly-bulletins/qb-archive/2018/quarterly-bulletin---qb2-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=4>, forecasts that both housing and non-residential building should continue to recover strongly. The Bank has forecast growth for the construction sector as a whole of 14.8% and 11.7% for 2018 and 2019 respectively.

While it is not possible to directly match the commencement information to social housing provision, as social housing may be delivered in a number of ways, it is expected that over 4,400 new build social homes will be delivered by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) either directly, through turnkey arrangements or under Part V arrangements, the latter reflecting the growth in private sector housing activity.

Looking overall at social housing delivery in 2018, it is expected that more than 25,000 additional households will have their housing need met, including just under 8,000 units to be built, acquired or leased by local authorities and AHBs, and in excess of 17,000 additional flexible housing solutions through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

This will have a direct impact on social housing waiting lists. The 85,799 households assessed as being qualified for social housing support nationally in 2017 saw a decrease of 6.3% on the comparable figure for 2016. The resources provided through Rebuilding Ireland are allowing us to respond in a significant manner. Over €1.4 billion was provided for investment in housing in 2017 and this is being increased significantly to €1.9 billion this year. This investment will yield substantial delivery activity and ensure that we make further significant progress towards meeting the overall target of delivering 137,000 social housing tenancies in the period to 2021, supported by an overall Exchequer commitment of over €6 billion.

One of the key outcomes of the second Housing Summit with local authority Chief Execu-

tives held earlier this year was a commitment to drive greater transparency and accountability at individual local authority level on the delivery of the targets under Rebuilding Ireland. On foot of a detailed process of engagement since then between my Department and individual local authorities, I have now advised local authorities of the social housing targets for 2018 and also for the multi-annual period to 2021. In setting local authority targets for 2018, I have been explicitly clear with local authorities that these are minimum targets, and that where additional capacity to deliver arises, we will work in partnership with local authorities to drive that accelerated delivery. The targets for each local authority have been published and are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

In direct response to the housing challenge and in order to support housing authorities deliver on their responsibilities and obligations, a number of dedicated structures have been put in place to support Approved Housing Bodies and local authorities to maximise their delivery potential and to harness the best that is available in their functional areas.

New rapid delivery construction is a vital part of the overall social housing delivery programme and 208 new homes have already been delivered through this scheme. An additional 24 rapid projects, involving over 650 new homes, are now being advanced, 283 of which are scheduled for delivery in 2018. New social housing construction schemes are being added to the pipeline on a continuous basis, both through the local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Of particular note has been the establishment of a framework of rapid build contractors by the Office of Government Procurement, which means that local authorities across the country can now run quicker procurement competitions and advance rapid build projects to site more effectively and efficiently. While the rapid build housing programme is being implemented to expedite social housing supply, it should be noted that these homes are being built to the highest construction standards.

All stakeholders are acutely aware of the challenge around homelessness and are highly focussed on delivering long-term sustainable solutions for those individuals and families experiencing homelessness. For families on the waiting lists who are experiencing homelessness, we will continue to work on further solutions to give them the support they need. During 2017, over 4,700 adults that were homeless, or at risk of homelessness, entered into independent sustainable tenancies.

The actions, targets and resources available under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong platform for meeting our challenges in the housing sector. I am satisfied that delivery of the Plan remains firmly on track and I and my Department will continue to work with all delivery partners to ensure that targets continue to be met.

Local Authority Housing Data

479. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent by which the local authority housing stock has increased by way of purchase of extra houses or new builds in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20079/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Data in relation to social housing delivery by local authorities is available on my Department's website. While data for 2018 to date is not yet available, detailed data in relation to 2017 is

available at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1b1-la-bld-by-area_10.xlsx.

In 2017, over 7,000 additional units were brought into the active social housing stock under Build, Acquisition and Leasing Programmes. This included 2,297 New build units, 2,214 acquired units, 827 leased units and 1,757 voids. In addition to this, over 18,800 flexible housing solutions were delivered under the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

In 2018, it is expected that more than 25,000 additional households will have their housing need met, including through HAP and RAS. In this regard, I recently wrote to all local authorities setting out their individual social housing targets across build, acquisition and leasing for 2018 and also for 2018-2021. Details of these are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

Rebuilding Ireland, together with initiatives announced on foot of the targeted review of progress which was undertaken last year, as well as additional measures announced under Budget 2018, provides a robust framework for addressing the housing and homelessness challenges we face. My Department's focus, and that of all delivery agents, will remain on implementation and delivery to ensure that the range of objectives and targets set are achieved. A wide range of delivery mechanisms and a funding commitment of €6 billion over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland have been put in place to support the achievement of these targets.

Questions Nos. 480 and 481 answered with Question No. 478.

Local Authority Housing Data

482. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of families rehoused by Kildare County Council in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20082/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Kildare County Council, along with all other local authorities, is being funded to increase significantly its delivery of social housing as part of Rebuilding Ireland.

Details on the number of social houses constructed, purchased, leased or supported through the Housing Assistance Payment or Rental Accommodation Scheme by all local authorities over the past 3 years, including Kildare County Council is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

In accordance with Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations, the allocation of such additional social homes in Kildare and the normal reletting of properties otherwise becoming available are a matter for the Council. Accordingly, my Department does not hold information regarding their precise allocation.

Housing Policy

483. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which facilities are available to meet the housing needs of the indigenous rural population throughout rural Ireland by way of ensuring an adequate number of houses in keeping with good planning principles to facilitate in so far as is possible the indigenous needs of those living in rural areas thereby reducing the impact on housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20083/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Planning Framework (NPF), published together with the National Development Plan (NDP) as part of Project Ireland 2040 in February 2018, 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.

Project Ireland 2040 will ensure that we maintain the fabric of our rural communities, support the growth of rural towns while recognising the need for the open countryside to continue to be a living and lived-in landscape, and invest to support job creation. The NPF is a national plan, with a high-level ambition of creating a single vision, a shared set of goals for every community across the country, and to deliver on these in a way that makes sense for our communities, rural and urban alike.

The Framework recognises the need for sustainable and coordinated development of our towns, villages and rural communities. The policy objectives under the NPF will be progressed further at the regional level through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) which will link strategic national planning and investment with regional-scale physical planning and the local economic and community development functions of local authorities. Preparation of the RSESs by the three Regional Assemblies is underway, with completion envisaged by end 2018. The RSESs will subsequently be further elaborated upon at local authority city and county development plan levels.

In addition, the Deputy will be aware that the Action Plan for Rural Development, published in January 2017, takes a whole-of-Government approach, led by my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, to the economic and social development of rural Ireland and will act as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of rural initiatives across Government Departments and other public bodies.

A high proportion of overall national house-building taking place in rural areas points to the degree to which indigenous communities in rural areas are being facilitated in meeting their housing needs locally, with a degree of overspill development from cities and towns as well.

In addition, my Department's 2005 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing are designed to ensure that planning authorities strike a balance between managing the future of rural areas from a development perspective and at the same time enabling housing requirements of rural communities to be met. The Guidelines set out how planning authorities should frame their development plan policies for the different types of rural areas which may exist within the development plan area. These types of areas range from rural areas close to cities and towns at risk of overspill development and more remote areas with low levels of development pressure and consistent patterns of population decline. The Guidelines also set out policy advice on issues such as access to appropriate wastewater treatment facilities, potential impacts of the development on groundwater, landscape, natural and cultural heritage and addressing road safety issues (e.g. frontage onto national roads).

I am satisfied that we have a sufficiently flexible and robust national policy framework to ensure that rural communities can meet their housing needs.

Local Authority Housing Data

484. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses and new housing starts in each of the counties immediately adjacent to Dublin city and county over the past 12 months; the expectation in the next six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20084/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a range of datasets relating to housing market activity on the statistics area of its website. Details of commencement notices received by each of the 31 local authorities are published as a monthly series which can be accessed through the following weblink: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-starts>.

The latest Monthly Housing Activity Report (March 2018), which is available on www.rebuildingireland.ie, is showing continued positive trends in residential construction activity and is evidence that the targeted supply-side interventions under Rebuilding Ireland are beginning to work. The report includes, where available, sub-totals for the Mid-East area which comprises the counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. The most recent headline figures show that:

- In the year to end February 2018, commencement notices for over 18,500 new homes were submitted nationally, an annual increase of 41%. 3,172 of these were in the Mid-East Area, representing an annual increase of 45% in that region.

- Planning permissions for 20,776 homes were granted to end-December 2017, up 27% year on year. 4,530 of these were in the Mid-East Area, representing an annual increase of 72% in that region.

- In the year to end February 2018, Registrations for Homebond, an insurance scheme that relates primarily to multiple unit housing schemes, totalled 9,521, an annual increase of 46%. 2,279 of these were in the Mid-East Area, representing an annual increase of 40% in that region.

The next Monthly Housing Activity Report is expected to be published shortly.

Finally, as regards the outlook for the coming years, all indicators and estimates point towards a continued increase in output. For example, the Central Bank in its Quarterly Bulletin (Q2 2018), which is available at the following weblink: <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/quarterly-bulletins/qb-archive/2018/quarterly-bulletin---qb2-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=4>, forecasts that both housing and non-residential building should continue to recover strongly. The Bank has forecast growth for the construction sector as a whole of 14.8% and 11.7% for 2018 and 2019, respectively.

Question No. 485 answered with Question No. 478.

Home Loan Scheme

486. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the need to install a robust local authority housing loan system similar to that available in the 1980s will be examined with the objective of ensuring that families that do not qualify for local authority housing on income grounds can apply for a loan to buy or construct their own houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20086/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, a new loan offering, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, was made available on 1 February 2018.

The new loan enables credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first-time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources. Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information is available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website, <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

Local Authority Housing Data

487. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority houses directly under construction by the local authorities at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20087/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Construction Status Report covering the period up to Quarter 4 of 2017 was published on 19 April 2018 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>. It provides project and stage details of the social housing construction pipeline in place at end of 2017 for all local authorities, including those construction projects being delivered in partnership with approved housing bodies.

The report shows a pipeline to deliver over 13,400 social homes, a very substantial increase on the 8,430 homes in the pipeline a year earlier. At end 2017, almost 2,600 social homes were completed, with another 3,650 homes under construction, 1,900 homes about to go on site and the remaining 5,300 homes progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement.

If we exclude new social homes being delivered by approved housing bodies, this shows local authority led activity at 8,000 homes, with 1,330 homes completed, a further 1,900 homes under construction and a further 380 homes about to go on site, with the remaining 4,400 progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement.

My Department will continue to work with local authorities to maximise delivery and also harness appropriate opportunities to deliver on additional build units in 2018, including through turnkey schemes.

Housing Provision

488. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he remains assured that adequate suitable and serviced building lands remain available in each local authority area to facilitate house building in line with requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20088/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 44 and 53 on today's Order Paper, which broadly sets out

the position in relation to this matter.

In addition, while the delivery of social and affordable homes will, of course, rely significantly on the State developing the full potential of its existing residential land bank, I am cognisant of the fact that some local authorities may need to acquire land, in order to deliver on their targets under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department is working with local authorities in relation to their proposals for bringing their land banks forward for residential development, and identifying their needs for future land requirements.

With regard to housing delivery more broadly, the Residential Land Availability Survey 2014, published in February 2015, determined the location and quantity of lands that may be regarded as being undeveloped and available for residential development purposes at 31 March 2014 in each local authority area. This survey measured the total amount of lands, whether owned privately or by the local authority, that have been identified for housing development in the various local authority development plans and that are the highest priority for development.

The area of such lands amounted to 17,434 hectares which, given a range of densities appropriate to whether the areas are in small villages or larger towns and cities and as determined by the relevant local authorities, could support the construction of over 414,000 dwellings. On that basis, I am satisfied that adequate lands are available to facilitate residential development in line with Rebuilding Ireland. The Residential Land Availability Survey 2014 is available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/planning/residential-land-availability/residential-land-availability-survey>.

A further Residential Land Availability Survey will be undertaken in due course.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Implementation

489. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the legal advice he has received in relation to the basis of the Pyrite board's narrow interpretation of section 15(3) of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 (details supplied). [20123/18]

490. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to improve the pyrite remediation scheme in view of documented shortcomings. [20124/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 489 and 490 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board, and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of "last resort" and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board's website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The Act also sets out the broad parameters which the Board must have regard to when establishing the eligibility criteria for the pyrite remediation scheme.

The restriction in Section 15(3) of the Act preventing applications being made under the scheme by a person who purchases a dwelling on or after 12 December 2013 (the publication date of the Bill) applies where that person knew or ought to have known that the dwelling was constructed using hardcore containing reactive pyrite.

Following a number of requests for clarification in the matter, my Department has recently sought legal advice on the Board's interpretation of Section 15(3) and I will be in a position to consider this matter further following the receipt of the legal advice. However, it is important to note that ultimately the interpretation of the law is a matter for the courts.

My Department is in regular contact with the Board and the Housing Agency in relation to the implementation of the scheme and is satisfied with the arrangements that are currently in place.

In regard to the pyrite remediation scheme, the scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established, in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

The Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) recommended a categorisation system as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works in recognition of the expensive and intrusive nature of pyrite remediation and the unpredictability of pyritic heave. The independent Pyrite Panel was clear in its view that only dwellings with significant damage due to pyritic heave should be remediated and that it would be unreasonable to expect dwellings not exhibiting such damage to be remediated.

Dwellings which have no significant damage but have reactive pyrite in the hardcore material should be monitored and only remediated if they display significant damage due to pyritic heave. This remains the position with regard to dwellings which do not display significant pyritic damage.

On foot of this recommendation of the Pyrite Panel, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) published I.S. 398-1:2013 Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol in 2013. The standard provides the means by which dwellings that may be affected by pyrite can be tested and categorised.

In late 2015, the NSAI commenced a review of I.S. 398-1:2013 in the light of practical experience since the standard was first introduced in January 2013. The standard was updated and revised to reflect the on-site experiences and evidence gathered by technical experts, such as engineers, geologists, professionals providing sampling and testing services and other technical experts, who have been using the standard over the past four years and was published on 4 August 2017.

I welcome the revised standard published by the NSAI and in this context I signed the Pyrite Resolution (Standard for Testing) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 556 of 2017) on 6 December 2017. These Regulations provide that pursuant to section 14(9)(a) of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013, the "standard for testing" for the purpose of the Act shall be Irish Standard 398-1:2017 Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material - Part 1: Testing and Categorisation Protocol, as published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland on 4 August 2017.

Any amendments which the Pyrite Resolution Board consider are required to the scheme as a result of the revised standard will be given full consideration should they be submitted to me in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

The latest figures available indicate that a total of 2,031 applications have been received under the scheme. Of these, 1,594 dwellings have been included in the scheme and the applicants notified accordingly.

A further 85 applications have been validated and referred to the Housing Agency for the Assessment and Verification Process, while another 225 applications are at the initial Application and Validation Process stage. 127 applications under the scheme were not successful.

Of the 1,594 dwellings that have been included in the pyrite remediation scheme:

- 284 are at remedial works planning stage,
- 85 are at tender/tender analysis,
- 208 are under remediation, and
- 1,017 are complete.

A sum of €30 million was announced under Budget 2018 to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme this year. This allocation will facilitate the remediation of some 430 additional dwellings and is a clear signal of the continuing importance attached by Government to addressing the issue of significant pyritic damage in private dwellings.

Local Authority Housing Funding

491. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding will be made available to Westmeath County Council to purchase houses to enable persons that have lived in such houses as rented accommodation and which are now being disposed of by financial institutions and in which the purchase thereof would prevent homeless situations arising; if so, the criteria for making such funding available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20125/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides funding to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use. Identifying and undertaking such social housing acquisitions is largely delegated to local authorities, so that they may respond flexibly to all opportunities to provide new social housing. Such funding is also provided on the basis that the houses are suitable for social housing use and suitable also across a range of other considerations including value for money, design, planning and other compliances. As the housing authority for its area, it is a matter in the first case for Westmeath County Council to determine the suitability of any units for acquisition.

Housing Adaptation Grant Expenditure

492. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the additional revenue that would be required in 2019 if the budget for the housing adaptation grants for older persons and persons with a disability increased by 25% or by 50%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20154/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am conscious of the social benefit accruing from the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, particularly in terms of facilitating the continued independent living by older people and people with a disability in their own homes. This is recognised

in the Programme for Government and as a consequence, funding for these schemes has been increasing year on year since 2014.

In 2018, a total of €66.25m is available for these schemes. This is made up of €53m exchequer funding, which is an increase of 11% on the 2017 figure, with the balance of €13.25m coming from local authority resources.

Increasing funding by 25% would cost an additional €13.25m to the Exchequer, with a further €3.3m to be contributed by the local authorities, while an increase of 50% would cost an additional €26.5m to the Exchequer, with a further €6.6m to be contributed by the local authorities.

Further consideration will be given to increasing funding over the coming years in the context of the range of housing supports and provision being made under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Approved Housing Bodies

493. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address queries (details supplied) in relation to approved housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20166/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government has set out an ambitious set of targets for the delivery of social housing to the period to 2021 in its multi-faceted plan Rebuilding Ireland. A commitment to deliver 50,000 new social housing units through a range of delivery mechanisms has been supported by a multi-annual Exchequer commitment totalling €6.5 billion over the period. These targets will be achieved using a combination of building, purchasing and leasing high quality properties to meet the needs of households on local authority waiting lists around the country.

10,000 of these units will be leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs) under leasing arrangements from a range of different sources. 3,500 are targeted to be achieved using the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) which harnesses the potential of existing vacant stock and brings it back into use for social housing. The remaining 6,500 properties to be leased are intended to be secured under long-term lease arrangements from a variety of sources which will include existing housing stock and newly built units.

Rental payments in respect of leases are either guaranteed to the owner by the local authority or by the AHB. In addition, where the property is leased from the owner by an AHB, and made available to the local authority for social housing, the payments are guaranteed to the AHB by the relevant local authority under a Payment and Availability (P&A) Agreement. In both cases, the local authority is committed to contractual lease payments to the owner regardless of vacancy periods.

In all cases, the relevant local authority makes payments to the property owner in accordance with the terms of the lease, or to the AHB in accordance with the P&A agreement, with the full costs being recouped to the local authority, in advance, from my Department on a quarterly basis. My Department has committed to these payments on an ongoing basis to allow local authorities and AHBs to enter long-term leases with private landlords.

Local authorities are statutory bodies under the Local Government Act 2001 and other enactments; all leases and P&A agreements entered into by local authorities are either approved by my Department or entered into with delegated authority from my Department, and central

Government supports local authorities in meeting their obligations.

Funding for my Department's leasing programme, including the Enhanced Lease, is provided to local authorities via the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). The State's expenditure is made up of Voted and Non-Voted Current and Capital expenditure. The SHCEP scheme is part of my Department's Voted Current expenditure. An allocation of €115 million, which includes €83.4 million in respect of continuing contractual commitments, has been secured for SHCEP in 2018. This is an increase of €31 million compared to 2017. It should be noted that the SHCEP scheme has been in place since 2009 and the State has never defaulted on current expenditure requirements by failing to make the necessary appropriation in any given year. Existing liabilities will continue to have first call in the annual allocation of budgets.

Question No. 494 answered with Question No. 462.

Nitrates Action Programme Review

495. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Exchequer funding allocated to the Nitrates Action Programme in each of the years 2018 to 2021; the 2018 funding allocation by current and capital funding; the number of full and part-time staff working directly on the programme in his Department; and the annual running costs including staffing costs for his Department in tabular form. [20175/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, as amended, give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to Ireland's fourth Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) for 2018 -2021 which was agreed with the European Commission in December 2017 after extensive negotiation.

Ireland's NAP contains enhanced measures for the protection of waters based on scientific research findings and a collaborative approach to improving our water quality. The NAP is designed to prevent pollution of surface waters and ground water from agricultural sources and to protect and improve water quality. Member states are required to review their NAP at least every four years.

A number of officials within the Water Division of my Department, in conjunction with officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, spent much of 2017 working on a review of the third NAP and on the development of the fourth programme, including negotiations with the European Commission. No Exchequer funding is allocated to the NAP by my Department and it is not possible to specify the portion of staffing costs directly attributable to NAP-related work given that it is one of a range of areas of activity focused on maintaining and improving water quality in Ireland.

Departmental Programmes

496. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Exchequer funding allocated to the sustainability support and advisory programme in each of the years 2018 to 2021; the 2018 funding allocation by current and capital funding; the number of full and part-time staff working directly on the programme in his Department; and the annual running costs including staffing costs for his Department in tabular form. [20177/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 17 April 2018, I launched the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/rbmp_full_reportweb.pdf.

In accordance with the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy), this Plan sets out a comprehensive programme of measures to enhance the quality of water in Ireland's rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater. Among these measures is the establishment of the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) to promote and encourage sustainable farming while meeting stringent water quality requirements. This initiative is an innovative collaboration between Government and industry and is supported by my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and by Dairy Industry Ireland.

The initiative will support a free one-to-one sustainability advisory service to more than 5,000 farmers to encourage behavioural change, facilitate knowledge transfer and achieve better on-farm environmental outcomes. A total of 30 new Agricultural Sustainability Advisors will be assigned to the programme, 20 of whom will be located in Teagasc while 10 will operate within the dairy processors' organisational structures.

The programme will be funded jointly by my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the dairy processors and the details of the funding arrangements are currently the subject of consultation between the relevant organisations. I expect that my Department will provide annual funding in the order of €1 million per annum for the period 2018-2021 to the programme, all of which will be current funding.

No members of staff of my Department will work directly on the programme; instead, my officials will contribute to the governance and oversight of the Programme as part of their normal activity to support the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and its associated environmental goals.

Departmental Websites

497. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there was a text amendment made to a section on a website (details supplied) regarding Enniscrone, County Sligo since 22 February 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19706/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): On 18 April 2018, an explanatory note regarding the meaning and origin of the placename Inis Crabhann / Inishcrone, which was originally written on 9 March 2017, was amended on the public interface of Logainm.ie (the placenames database of Ireland).

Instead of 'Inis Crabhann: A corruption of Inis Eiscir Abhann', the explanatory note was altered to read:

(Irish text) "De réir dealraimh tharla athdheighilt ar Eiscir Abhann (bunleagan an logainm seo) go Eis C(i)rabhann, agus tharla athanailís ina dhiaidh go Inis (S)Cr(e)abhann > Inis Crabhann. Bhí an leagan seo ann ón 16ú aois ar aghaidh ar a laghad. Níl fianaise ar bith ann go raibh Inis Eiscir Abhann ann mar leagan Gaeilge den logainm seo fhad is a bhí an Ghaeilge fós beo mar theanga an phobail anseo."

(English text) “This place-name seems to be the result of the re-segmentation of Eiscir Abhann ‘esker of the river’ in speech to Eis C(i)rabhann, which resultantly underwent re-analysis to Inis (S)Cr(e)abhann > Inis Crabhann. This version of the name was in use from the 16th century onwards at least. There is no evidence to suggest that the form Inis Eiscir Abhann was ever the Irish form of this place-name when Irish was the vernacular here.”

Explanatory notes such as this are provided by the Placenames Branch as an additional service to the public, further to the Branch’s primary remit of establishing the authoritative Irish versions of placenames. These notes are subject to revision and alteration and further notes are added on an ongoing basis.

The Irish name Inis Crabhann was given legal status in a Statutory Order that took effect in July 1975, made under the Placenames Act (Irish Forms) 1973. This was confirmed by the Placenames (Centres of Population and Districts) Order 2005, which took effect in March 2005, superseding the previous Statutory Order.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

498. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the landholding of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry is a special area of conservation; her future plans to designate this area as a special area of conservation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19669/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Ireland has identified 439 sites for protection as special areas of conservation under the EU Habitats Directive. It is required, under the Directive, to formally designate its special areas of conservation and a project is in place within my Department to oversee this process. This involves the adoption of a Statutory Instrument for each site. These are not new sites – most have been legally protected for 15 years or more. The making of Statutory Instruments is the final step in the designation of special areas of conservation and does not place any new or additional conditions on landowners/users than already applied from the time the sites were first identified for designation as special areas of conservation.

The landholding referred to in the Deputy’s Question lies within the Killarney National Park/Magillicuddy’s Reeks/Caragh River Catchment site, which was selected for designation as a special area of conservation in 1997.

EU Directives

499. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the review of derogations from the EU Birds Directive will be complete having regard to the declarations in place; if methods to control seagull species can be put in place for the Howth and Sutton areas in Dublin; if an actual cull of seagulls can be considered; the way in which public consultation on this matter operates in practice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19938/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The EU Birds Directive allows Member States to make derogations from its protective measures in respect of certain wild bird species in certain circumstances - for example, where they are causing damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or safety or to air safety. The Declarations to implement these derogations are renewed annually and an annual

review of the Declarations is undertaken prior to their expiry. The review process includes consideration of the views of stakeholders, such as hunting and conservation bodies, and airport authorities on the operation of the declarations.

This review for the period 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018 took into account the issue of seagulls in the North Dublin area especially in Balbriggan which had been the subject of correspondence to my Department from some community groups and other residents which proposed the inclusion of seagull species in the Declaration.

Following consideration of the matter, the last Declaration, which was effective from 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018, included methods to control seagull species in the Balbriggan area for public safety reasons. The control method involved the removal of eggs and nests only; the culling of seagulls was not permitted.

These changes were introduced on a one year pilot basis and are subject to review as part of a wider comprehensive review of the operation of the derogations. This comprehensive review, which is currently underway, will take account of all relevant factors, including perceived threats, distribution and population data available in respect of all the bird species in the declaration. The Department appointed ANIAR Ecology to undertake the review following a public tendering process. The contract is for a period of five months with the final report scheduled for mid-June 2018. A completed interim report has been received from the consultants which includes recommendations in respect of the derogation process including in relation to the 2018/19 declarations.

The public consultation process on the review is now complete with submissions due by 4 May 2018. The public consultation process was advertised in the main daily newspapers, the Irish Farmers Journal and on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department. An extension of the derogation to Howth and Sutton is not under consideration at the present time, nor is a cull.

Clár Bonneagair agus Infheistíochta Caipitil

500. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an ndéanfaidh sí pobal na Gaeilge i nGlas Naíon, Baile Átha Cliath a chosaint ó dhochar a d'fhéadfadh tógáil MetroLink a tharraingt orthu, ó tharla go bhfuil sé beartaithe suíomh mór tógála a thógáil in aice le Scoil Mobhí agus Scoil Chaitríona; an raibh comhráite aici le pobal Gaeilge na háite faoin gceist agus leis an Aire Iompair agus le BIÉ; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [20009/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tuigfidh an Teachta nach bhfuil aon ról reachtúil agam maidir leis an gceist seo. Tá curtha in iúl dom, áfach, go bhfuil an tÚdarás Náisiúnta Iompar, i gcomhar le Bonneagar Iompar Éireann tar éis tús a chur le próiseas comhairliúcháin phoiblí chun an bealach atá molta faoi láthair do MetroLink a phlé.

Leanfaidh an chéim seo den phróiseas comhairliúcháin go 11 Bealtaine 2018 agus táthar ag iarraidh ionchur ón bpobal i gcoitinne agus, go príomha, uathu siúd atá lonnaithe ar an mbealach féin, faoi mar atá Scoil Mobhí agus Scoil Chaitríona. Níl aon chinneadh críochnúil maidir leis an mbealach déanta go fóill. Tuigtear dom go ndéanfar seo tar éis an phróisis comhairliúcháin.

501. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she plans to proceed with the refurbishment of the National Concert Hall as committed to as part of Ireland 2040; when these works will go to tender; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20041/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Under its plan ‘Investing in our Culture, Heritage and Language’ the Government intends to invest €460m in a significant number of capital projects in our National Cultural Institutions over the period 2018 to 2027. Included in this figure is €78 million for the re-development of the National Concert Hall.

Investments under this plan will be subject to appraisal and evaluation in line with the Public Spending Code. This includes the consideration of a range of options prior to committing any funding to the project, an evaluation of the financial and economic implications of the project prior to procuring the project, and robust project management arrangements throughout the implementation phase.

More details on the delivery of this project will emerge as my Department goes through this process of appraising and planning for this important investment.

National Concert Hall

502. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the additional facilities that may be required at the National Concert Hall if the recommendations of the Boaden report in respect of the future of the National Symphony Orchestra is implemented; the way in which the funding will be provided for to facilitate the National Concert Hall in enabling such a transfer is to take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20042/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Both the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and I have welcomed the recommendations of the RTÉ report in relation to the provision of orchestral music.

The report has recommended that the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra should be a national cultural institution in its own right, or within the National Concert Hall. It should be noted that the National Symphony Orchestra has been located in the National Concert Hall since it opened in 1981 and it provides the backbone to the Hall’s orchestral music programme. Therefore, there is no change in venue required for any organisational change.

I have also recently announced a major €78m plan to redevelop the National Concert Hall as part of the Government’s capital investment plan for Culture, Language and Heritage. This includes provision of a larger hall and proper rehearsal facilities for the National Symphony Orchestra. There is now an opportunity for the National Symphony Orchestra to play an even stronger role in the cultural life of the national as part of these wider developments.

Officials in our Departments have been asked to advance the recommendations of the report as a matter of priority. This will require intense engagement between both our Departments and RTÉ, and with the National Concert Hall. The concerns of employees of the orchestras will be to the forefront of considerations and there will be need to be significant engagement with them in this regard.

I expect to bring an early report to Government to chart a way forward including the steps which will be needed to address the recommendations.

EU Directives

503. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if it is technically feasible to introduce a new forestry management protocol covering special protection areas important to the hen harrier which would permit an annual quota of new plantings based on the areas identified as available for planting by National Parks and Wildlife Service; and the barriers that remain from pursuing this policy as previously existed. [20048/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): This is a complex and difficult issue and a previous protocol on forestry was discarded as the European Commission considered it was not compliant with the EU Birds Directive.

My Department has prepared a draft Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan in cooperation with the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (including the Forestry Service), Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and Housing Planning and Local Government. The draft Threat Response Plan will be discussed with Departments and with the Consultative Committee, drawn from relevant sectors, in the coming days and further as necessary. The draft Plan must also go to public consultation.

The decision to issue afforestation licences and grant aid rests with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and in summary, under the European Communities (Birds And Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, any Minister considering a plan or project in a Special Protection Area (SPA) shall give consent for such a plan or project only after having determined that the plan or project shall not adversely affect the integrity of a European site. The Court of Justice of the EU has issued a series of judgements stressing that there must be no doubt about possible adverse impacts in such decisions. In addition, under the European Union Guidelines for State Aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas, within SACs and SPAs, only afforestation consistent with the management objectives of the sites concerned and agreed with Member State's authority in charge of implementing Natura 2000 (in Ireland's case, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) shall be allowed.

Departmental Reports

504. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a report (details supplied) into the audio visual sector will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20163/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to publish this report within the coming weeks.