

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 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Sector Pay

14. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the recent report on salary scale issues in respect of post-January 2011 recruits insofar as it relates to the Defence Forces intake in that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20388/18]

18. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the content of the report on pay equalisation as specified in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017; the actions he will take from the report; his plans for process to pay and equalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21712/18]

25. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress that has been made in negotiations with the relevant parties regarding the salary scale for post-2011 entrants to the public service under the terms of the PSSA; and the roadmap and timeframe towards pay equalisation in the public sector. [21511/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14, 18 and 25 together.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA), provided that an examination of remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades would be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

Additionally, as the Deputy is aware, this Government accepted an amendment at Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, that within 3 months of the passing of the Act, I would prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.

This was a significant body of work and staff resources from within the Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES) were assigned to collect, collate and examine the data and provide detailed point in time costs associated with the measure.

In accordance with the legislation I submitted a report to the Oireachtas on 16 March.

This report estimated the overall cost of a two point increment adjustment at €200m for

the 60,500 staff identified as new entrants. Of this, approximately €3m is associated with new entrants in the Department of Defence. Work has continued to improve the accuracy of this estimate and as a result of new data submitted it is likely that the estimated cost in the Department of Defence will increase slightly. It is not expected that this additional data will impact the overall estimated cost of approximately €200m per annum.

Discussion on this issue with Unions, which commenced in October of last year, are ongoing with the last meeting taking place on 27 April. Further engagement is being arranged for early June.

Office of Government Procurement

15. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Government Procurement has statutory or other authority to advise, consult or manage local authority procurement processes; the policies in place to ensure fairness and consistent public procurement processes are used by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21672/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU legislation and National rules and guidelines. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) has responsibility for developing and setting out the overarching policy framework for public procurement in Ireland. In this regard, the OGP has developed the National Public Procurement Policy Framework which consists of 5 strands:

- Legislation (Directives, Regulations)
- Government Policy (Circulars, etc.)
- Capital Works Management Framework for Public Works
- General Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services
- More detailed technical guidelines, template documentation and information notes as issued periodically by the OGP

This framework enables a more consistent approach to public procurement across the public sector by setting out the procurement procedures to be followed by public bodies. The framework supports contracting authorities, including the OGP, the four key sectors (Health, Education, Local Government and Defence), individual Departments, Offices, commercial and non-commercial State bodies, and entities which are subsidised 50% or more by a public body, when awarding contracts for works, goods and services. It enables public bodies to adopt procedures to meet their Public Procurement requirements and facilitates compliance with EU and National Procurement Rules.

I should point out that Local Authorities like all Contracting Authorities are responsible for adhering to the procurement policy framework and for the individual procurement decisions they make. In terms of adopting a consistent approach to public procurement, I understand that the Local Government Management Agency provides advice and assistance to Local Authorities regarding national and EU procurement regulations and contract management issues affect-

ing their activities and monitors legislative and case law developments to ensure its processes remain current in light of these developments and other best practice initiatives.

I would add that, last July, my colleague, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan, launched new Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services. This comprehensive interpretation of the public procurement directives has been designed to improve consistency and promote best practice in the application of the public procurement rules.

However, it is worth noting that while the OGP guidelines facilitate and enable compliance with public procurement rules, it is the responsibility of each Contracting Authority, including the Local Authority Sector, to ensure they adhere to these rules.

The OGP supports compliance by putting in place compliant procurement solutions, publishing guidelines and template documentation and proactive engagement with our sourcing partners in the Health, Education, Defence and Local Government Sectors through the Procurement Executive. The solutions provided by the OGP include a broad range of Framework Agreements from which public bodies can draw down goods or service, and include areas as diverse as uniforms, food, legal services, IT, and electricity.

Furthermore, the OGP's Key Account Managers are in regular contact with Procurement Officers in Government Departments and State Bodies, including the Local Authority Sector to assist, support and remind them of their obligations in relation to public procurement.

Finally, National rules and EU Directives are clear that individual contracting authorities are responsible for establishing arrangements for ensuring the proper conduct of their affairs, including conformance to standards of good governance and accountability with regard to procurement. In this regard, the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) audits the accounts and provides independent scrutiny of the financial stewardship of local authorities and other local bodies.

Budget Targets

16. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which public expenditure trends remain in line with original budgetary projections; if corrective measures are required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21674/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Managing the delivery of public services within allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department. There are important measures in place to ensure that our budgetary targets are being met and my Department is in regular contact with all other Departments and offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. Expenditure profiles are published for each month, and the drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored throughout the year and reported on against profile on a monthly basis in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, total gross Voted Expenditure at end-April 2018 was €19,216 million. This is €74 million, or 0.4%, below profile and an increase of €1,367 million, or 7.7%, on the same period in 2017.

Of the total €19,216 million, gross voted current expenditure accounts for €18,084 million, which is €192 million, or 1.1% ahead of profile, and an increase of €1,177 million, or 7.0% on the same period in 2017. This level of year-on-year increase is partly due to timing issues relating to Child Benefit and Garda Pension payments, profiled for May, which were brought

forward to April. As outlined in the April Fiscal Monitor, this arose as the Trans-European Automated Real-time Gross settlement Express Transfer (TARGET) system was closed on the first of May. These timing issues will reverse in May.

Gross voted capital expenditure accounts for €1,132 million, which is €266 million, or 19% below profile and an increase of €190 million, or 20.1% on April 2017. Capital expenditure in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government Vote Group is running €158m or 43% behind profile. This is largely due to a delay in drawing down payments to Irish Water. It is anticipated that these drawdowns will be completed in the coming months bringing expenditure back in line with profile.

As at the end of April, 13 of 17 Vote Groups are either at or on profile. My Department will continue to engage with all other Departments and Offices throughout the year in relation to expenditure management.

Flood Relief Schemes Data

17. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of the management of the River Shannon as part of the Managing Flood Risk in Ireland report; the timelines of the projects announced in the report; the annual funding allocation until 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21670/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme was the largest ever flood risk study carried out in the State and covered 300 areas believed to be at significant flood risk. The CFRAM programme culminated with the launch by me in Athlone on 3 May, 2018 of 29 Flood Risk Management Plans which proposed 118 new outline flood relief projects on top of the 42 major projects already completed and the 33 major schemes within the existing capital works programme of the Office of Public Works (OPW).

I was delighted to be able to launch the Plans with the Taoiseach and to announce a major 10 year €1billion programme of investment in flood relief measures. I also said on the day of the launch that it would not be possible to implement all of the capital projects in one go and that a phased approach was necessary. In that regard I also announced funding of €257 million for an initial phase of 50 flood relief projects throughout the country which would be progressed to detailed design and construction, including the 5 largest schemes identified in the Plans among them Limerick city and Tralee and 31 small or minor projects under €1 million which will be progressed directly by the local authorities.

The OPW is working closely with the local authorities to commence the progression of the projects. Details on the arrangements for the advancement of the five largest schemes, each with a value of between €15m and €40m, and 14 schemes costing between €1m and €15m, will be agreed with the relevant local authorities in the near future.

The allocation of almost €1billion by the Government in the National Development Plan up to 2027 for flood risk management will allow the annual allocation for flood risk measures increase from almost €70m in 2018 to €100m per annum by 2021 and thereafter.

There are ten projects directly on the River Shannon from Limerick City upstream to Leitrim Village which are to be implemented over the course of the next ten years. One scheme from the existing Capital Programme is already underway in Athlone and will be completed over the next two years. Another five schemes will be advanced as part of the first tranche of new projects. Another four projects will be part of the second tranche to be implemented. The total

investment in these projects will be approximately €90m.

Over the whole of the River Shannon River Basin District (RBD) 34 areas will have new flood relief schemes implemented over the course of this 10 year programme to 2027, which will provide flood protection to over 3,200 properties.

In addition to the capital projects, the Shannon Flood Risk Management Plan also sets out a broad range of non-structural measures to manage flood risk in the Shannon catchment including maintenance of Arterial Drainage Schemes and Drainage Districts, ongoing Operation and Maintenance of Infrastructure Associated with Hydro-Power Generation on the River Shannon, improving Long-Range Forecasting on the river Shannon to Optimise Operation of Water Level Management Infrastructure and the continued coordination of water level management by all relevant agencies on the Shannon to assist in reducing flood risk. The latter measure, in particular, is one of the key objectives of the River Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group established by the Government in January 2016. This is a solutions focussed group that added value to the Shannon CFRAM Study by ensuring the best possible level of co-ordination between all statutory bodies involved in flood risk management of the Shannon River Basin.

The Group is trialling the lowering of the lake levels on Lough Allen since 2016. It is examining a plan for strategic maintenance, to help reduce further deterioration of the River Shannon, and is also examining the development of viable flood risk reduction measures in the Shannon Callows.

Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 14.

Question No. 19 answered with Question No. 8.

Public Service Pay Commission Remit

20. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made with the Public Service Pay Commission regarding recruitment and retention issues in particular areas of the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21669/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) 2018-2020, includes a commitment to examine the issue of recruitment and retention in the public service.

The Public Service Pay Commission addressed the issue of recruitment and retention across the public service in their initial report published in May 2017. While high level evidence collected by the Commission in their first report indicated that there are no significant recruitment difficulties across the main public service vocational streams, it found evidence of some recruitment and retention issues in certain specific areas. These include certain areas of the Health sector and the Defence Forces, as well as senior executive and professional posts in the civil service.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 included a commitment to request the Public Service Pay Commission to undertake a more comprehensive examination of recruitment and retention issues in those sectors and employment streams where difficulties are evident.

In accordance with this provision, the Commission commenced its examination late last

year and is expected to complete its task by end 2018. The Commission is adopting a modular approach to its work with the first module, currently being progressed, comprising an examination of the health sector grades of nurses, consultants and doctors. This will provide the evidence base as to the nature and extent of any recruitment and retention issues and the causal factors contributing to them.

The Commission have been asked to present a range of options for resolving any specific issues identified having full regard to the fiscal constraints and requirements on Government to manage the Exchequer pay bill in a sustainable way over the medium and long-term.

Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme

21. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an updated report on the plan to develop flood defences on the upper Lee at Inchigeela; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21659/18]

31. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an updated report on the plan to develop flood defences on the upper Lee at Ballingeary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21658/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 21 and 31 together.

The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme was the largest ever flood risk study carried out in the State and covered 300 areas believed to be at significant flood risk. The CFRAM programme culminated with the launch by me in Athlone on 3 May, 2018 of 29 Flood Risk Management Plans which proposed 118 new outline flood relief projects on top of the 42 major projects already completed and the 33 major schemes within the existing capital works programme of the Office of Public works (OPW).

I was delighted to be able to launch the Plans with the Taoiseach and to announce a major 10 year €1 billion programme of investment in flood relief measures. I also said on the day of the launch that it would not be possible to implement all of the capital projects in one go and that a phased approach was necessary. In that regard I also announced funding of €257 million for an initial phase of 50 flood relief projects throughout the country which would be progressed to detailed design and construction, including the 5 largest schemes identified in the Plans and 31 small or minor projects under €1 million which will be progressed directly by the local authorities.

Flood relief projects have been identified in the Plans for both Inchigeela and Ballingeary in County Cork at costs of €2.56m and €3.07m respectively. Neither area is in the first tranche of projects to be progressed, but I can give my assurance that the OPW and the local authority will work closely to ensure that both will be commenced in the coming years and within the 10 year timeframe for the programme of investment.

Public Private Partnerships

22. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the interdepartmental-agency group he established in 2017 to review Ireland's experience of using PPPs will report; the detail of his Department's ongoing work on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21604/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A senior-level Inter-Departmental/Agency Group was established last year to review Ireland's experience of PPPs and to make recommendations on the future role of PPPs, in the context of the development of the new 10 year National Development Plan (NDP). The Group reported to me earlier this year and I am currently reviewing their comprehensive report, which I will be publishing shortly after bringing it to Government for information.

However, the key findings and recommendations of the PPP review have already been made public. They were summarised in section 2.2 of the NDP and further detailed in section 6.7 of the Plan.

As noted in the NDP, PPPs have been very useful in the past in facilitating the delivery of important infrastructure projects. This was particularly the case when the Exchequer was seriously constrained in terms of its ability to fund infrastructure directly. The fact that PPPs use private finance, on an off-balance sheet basis, enabled a number of key projects to proceed which would not otherwise have been deliverable on the basis of Exchequer funding alone.

In ensuring Departments obtain the best value-for-money from public capital investment, PPPs, just as traditionally procured projects, are subject to the same robust and rigorous project appraisal process as traditionally procured projects. All projects over €20m are required under the Public Spending Code to be subject to a Cost Benefit Analysis or Cost Effectiveness Analysis. In addition, all public investment projects of this value must also be referred to the National Development Finance Agency for advice in terms of the options for financing and procuring the projects.

As outlined in the NDP, and as recommended by the PPP Review, PPPs will continue to feature as a procurement option available to Government for appropriately structured projects which demonstrate value for money over a traditional procurement option and which meet the robust and rigorous tests for project appraisal that apply to all public investment projects under the Public Spending Code.

While there are a number of previously announced PPP projects in the pipeline for delivery over the coming years, no further specific additional projects have been identified in the NDP for procurement by PPP at this stage. Rather, it is essential that projects are judged on their merits, on a case by case basis, and if procurement by PPP is found to offer better value-for-money than traditional procurement in the case of the various projects identified for delivery in the NDP, then they should be selected and progressed by the relevant sponsoring Department or agency on that basis.

Public Sector Pay

23. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated levels of pre-committed Government expenditure in 2018 and 2019 for demographic-related costs and pay equalisation in the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21621/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) 2017, published in July last year set out the pre-Budget position for voted expenditure after taking account of the impact of demographics across the areas of health, education and social protection, and the carryover impact of prior year measures.

The MYER set out an estimate for demographic costs of €0.3 billion for 2018 and €0.4 billion for 2019 after taking account of estimated Live Register savings. The amounts included

in respect of demographic cost pressures are informed by the IGEES staff paper 'Budgetary Impact of Changing Demographics 2017 – 2027' published in September, 2016. This paper provides an estimate of the demographic cost pressures from 2017 to 2027 across the three main areas of current expenditure; Social Protection, Health and Education. Based on the analysis in the paper, in the short term, annual demographic cost pressures are expected to remain relatively static out to 2020, at an average of c. €0.4 billion per annum.

In relation to pay agreements, a total of €0.5 billion was allocated in 2018 to cover pay agreements for public servants in Expenditure Report 2018. This covered the final year of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and the first year of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 that was endorsed by the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in September last year. As outlined in Expenditure Report 2018, the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 will have a cost of €0.4 billion in 2019.

Departmental Contracts Data

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the number of contracts his Department and State agencies under his aegis hold with a company (details supplied) in view of its recent announcement regarding the need to raise an emergency €700 million; if contingency plans are in place if the company were to collapse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21666/18]

32. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that all contracts a company (details supplied) holds with his Department and State agencies under his aegis have been tendered for; if his attention has been drawn to contracts awarded to the company that have not been tendered for; if his attention has been further drawn to contracts awarded to the company that have rolled over; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21667/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 24 and 32 together.

My Department has no current contracts with the company in question.

For the most part, the bodies under the aegis of the Department hold no current contracts with this company, with the exception of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). The IPA holds a contract in respect of maintenance for their financial system. This contract resulted from a tendering process and the contract includes a provision for the contract to be renewed on an

annual basis between 2011 and 2018. Contingency is provided through the availability of other financial packages. I am advised that the Office of Public Works will provide any relevant information directly to the Deputy.

The Deputy may wish to note that the Office of Government Procurement has established six framework agreements that include as a member the company named in the question. These frameworks are for the provision of Professional Services, ICT and Managed Services. Contracts awarded as a result of a framework are put in place on behalf of other public service contracting authorities. My Department has not signed a contract for provision of services with this company. The administration of the contract once awarded is a matter for each contracting authority and contract details are held by the individual authority concerned.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 14.

Legislative Programme

26. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made in respect of the preparation of legislation regarding the changing of the compulsory retirement age for public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21605/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, on 5 December 2017, the Government agreed that the compulsory retirement age of most public servants recruited before 1 April 2004 should be increased to age 70. Primary legislation is required for this change to be implemented. The Attorney General's Office was requested to prioritise the drafting of the necessary legislation so that the new compulsory retirement age will become effective as soon as possible.

It is not possible to determine the length of time it will take for a Bill to be drafted and pass through both Houses of the Oireachtas, given the need for meticulous drafting, ongoing detailed policy considerations, and the scheduling requirements of the Houses of the Oireachtas. However, the drafting process is underway and the Bill is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the current session. Indeed, I understand that the drafting of the legislation is significantly advanced with an expected publication date, subject to Government approval, of next month.

In order to make some accommodation for public servants who reach the age of 65 in the period between the Government Decision of 5 December and the commencement of the necessary legislation, the Government approved some limited interim arrangements which became effective from the date of the Government Decision. The interim arrangements (which have to respect the current statutory position of the compulsory retirement age of 65) will, through retire and re-hire, enable pre 2004 public servants who reach the age of 65 to remain in employment until they reach the age of eligibility for the State Pension (Contributory), which is currently 66. Details of these interim implementation arrangements have been put in place by the relevant sectors.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

27. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans on foot of the IMF public investment management assessment for Ireland to ensure improvements in the efficiency and value for money of public investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21606/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Development Plan explicitly addresses the need to improve management of capital spend, including the challenges referenced such as maintenance of assets, drawing in particular on the 2017 PIMA report. These actions are in train; in particular, a Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board has been formed, consisting of Secretaries General from the main capital spending Departments, to ensure effective leadership of the implementation process. The Delivery Board had its first meeting on 1 May last.

This will lead to a greater focus by Government on achieving value for taxpayers' money when it comes to public capital investment in Ireland over the period of the plan.

In particular, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will establish an Infrastructure Projects and Programmes Office to drive strengthened business case and project appraisal, and to act as the gatekeeper on the appraisal process.

A Construction Sector Working Group is being established to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector in relation to significant issues relating to the successful delivery of the NDP on a value-for-money basis for the Exchequer.

This reform agenda was already begun with the publication in September 2017 of a Major Capital Projects Tracker on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The purpose of the tracker is to inform citizens of the variety of projects currently in the planning and construction phase and to also give a greater overview to the construction and infrastructure sectors of the Government's investment commitments and future opportunities for these sectors. The tracker will provide the public, businesses and other stakeholders with reliable information about current and future infrastructure delivery.

The Tracker is currently being updated to reflect the further projects now included in the National Development Plan and it will, in time, be further developed to become the primary tool for public transparency on infrastructure project priorities, timelines and performance targets.

Public Sector Pay

28. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has conducted an investigation into the prevalence of low pay across the different sectors of the public service; and his plans to address same. [21638/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to PQ 7028/18 answered on 13 February 2018. Currently there are no plans to undertake an investigation into this area.

Gender Proofing of Policies

29. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the mechanisms by which public performance budgeting will be achieved; the information that will be gathered to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure; and the measures to be taken in the event that organisations and public bodies fail to deliver under the rubric of public performance budgeting. [21513/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In recent years, significant reforms have been implemented to Ireland's budgetary framework to embed sound expenditure management practice that maintains a focus on the results being achieved across the public service and the extent to which public spending is delivering on key policy objectives. Performance budgeting is a key element of this suite of expenditure reform measures that also includes the augmentation of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES), tasked with carrying out evaluations and value for money reviews, and the Spending Review process that provides an evidence base to inform the prioritisation of expenditure.

A key aim of the performance budgeting initiative is to maximise the reporting of relevant quantitative metrics capable of being used to assess trends over time in order to underpin the scrutiny and appraisal of expenditure programmes. Since its introduction in 2011, performance budgeting has been subject to ongoing refinement with a clear focus on, and significant improvement in, the quality and volume of quantitative information published in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV). REV 2018, as part of a pilot programme of Equality Budgeting, also includes indicators relating to equality objectives for a number of Departments. The performance budgeting initiative also supports another important aim: transparency and accountability to the

Houses of the Oireachtas and to facilitate budget oversight by the Oireachtas.

Performance Budgeting operates within the wider expenditure framework that is focused on seeking to ensure that growth in public expenditure is sustainable. However, increasing and competing public service demands means that managing expenditure within these parameters is challenging. In this context, the focus must be on examining the totality of public expenditure including in particular the rationale/objectives, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of public spending. The Performance Budgeting initiative, with its focus on quantitative metrics that can be tracked over time complements the revised Spending Review process that was introduced last year. The over-arching purpose of the Spending Review is to broaden the Government's toolkit within the budgetary process. A systematic review of the effectiveness and impact of expenditure within the existing cost base can produce options for reprioritisation of expenditure in order to fund new policies from within existing ceilings.

As such performance budgeting cannot be viewed in isolation from the other expenditure reform measures such as the continued expansion of the IGEES and the Spending Review process, that all work towards embedding an ongoing evaluation culture across Government.

Public Sector Pay

30. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if, in the context of the increasing difficulty on recruiting and retaining employees in key areas of the public service, he will eliminate the pay inequality faced by new entrants into the public service. [21725/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA), provided that an examination of remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades would be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

Additionally, as the Deputy is aware, this Government accepted an amendment at Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, that within 3 months of the passing of the Act, I would prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.

This was a significant body of work and staff resources from within the Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES) were assigned to collect, collate and examine the data and provide detailed point in time costs associated with the measure.

In accordance with the legislation I submitted a report to the Oireachtas on 16 March. This report, and the substantial amount of work that has taken place since on this costing, will provide the evidence base for the negotiations that are ongoing.

Discussion on this issue with Unions, which commenced in October of last year, are ongoing with the last meeting taking place on 27 April. Further engagement is being arranged for early June.

In relation to recruitment and retention issues in the public service, the evidence shows that the public service is a good employer by any objective measurement. Public Service offers a comprehensive set of terms and conditions, flexible working arrangements, decent pension provisions, fair wages that increase over time and secure employment. While public service is a career choice, and people who serve are highly motivated by the public good, the competitiveness of the package on offer can be seen in the strong level of recruitment that this report has

highlighted.

Headline public service numbers already show a high level of recruitment of plus 29,000 since 2013. However this is the growth in the overall public service, as such it doesn't capture recruitment "below the line" replacing retirements and leavers.

The report I submitted on Friday 16 March 2018 however sheds light on this, revealing that over 60,500 people have been recruited in the "new entrant" grades since 2011. This represents almost a fifth of the current public service including over 16,000 teachers, nearly 5,000 Special Needs Assistants and almost 10,000 nurses. At an individual level people are looking at the remuneration package, including terms and conditions, and the opportunities that a career in the public service presents and are opting to join in great numbers. This substantiates a finding of the Public Service Pay Commission that there was no general recruitment problem, and that at lower pay levels there is a substantial pay premium in favour of public servants.

Where there may be specific recruitment problems in certain specialist areas the Public Service Pay Commission has been tasked to examine these issues in detail, starting with the Health sector, and I expect an initial report from the PSPC later this year.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 21.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 24.

EU Funding

33. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the detail of his Department's engagement with the European Commission in respect of the future continuation of the European Structural and Investment Fund supports for cross-Border projects after Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21603/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset I would like to restate the Irish Government's firm commitment to the successful implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG Programmes and to successor programmes post-2020.

As part of the contingency planning undertaken by the Government prior to the Brexit referendum, my Department identified the risks to these EU-funded programmes in the event of the UK voting to leave. The first official level contacts following the referendum result took place on the day of the result itself and these contacts have continued since.

Shortly after the result of the referendum I met the then Northern Ireland Finance Minister, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, and I proposed that we would jointly write to the EU's Regional Policy Commissioner, Corina Cretu, to highlight the importance we attach to the programmes. The future of the programmes has also been raised by Ministers at meetings of the General Affairs Council devoted to Cohesion Policy. In the margins of the Council meeting held under the Maltese Presidency I had a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Cretu about the programmes, and I subsequently wrote inviting her to visit the region and she has indicated her desire to do that.

I was pleased, therefore, that the Irish Government's ambitions for the programmes was reflected in December's EU-UK Joint Report on Brexit. Specifically, the report states that both parties would honour their commitments to the PEACE and INTERREG programmes under the current MFF and that possibilities for future support would be examined favourably.

December's Communication from the Commission to the European Council that accom-

panied the Joint Progress Report went further. In it the Commission not only acknowledged the great value of cross-border programmes in benefitting North South cooperation but also expressed its opinion that PEACE and INTERREG should continue beyond the current programming period. It committed itself to proposing the continuation of the programmes, based on their existing management structure, in its proposal for the next MFF, which I am pleased to say it has now done.

My Department is continuing to work with the Commission to ensure that the vital work of these programmes in supporting North South cooperation under the Good Friday Agreement can continue post-Brexit.

Question No. 34 answered with Question No. 7.

Equality Proofing of Budgets

35. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the work being carried out in respect of gender equality budgeting; the way in which this will be monitored and inputted into the final programme for the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21607/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The ongoing work regarding Equality Budgeting in Ireland follows the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to ‘develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights’. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 also contains a related commitment.

The elements that make gender and equality budgeting work such as impact analysis and evaluation are important in any good budgetary process. Gender and equality budgeting should not to be seen as something separate from the budget process, the intention is to embed a gender and equality perspective throughout the budgetary process, with a whole of year budgetary focus.

A pilot programme of equality budgeting for the 2018 budgetary cycle is underway, anchored in the existing performance budgeting framework. International experience has shown the importance of setting specific and measurable targets. This approach works well in terms of transparency around objectives and measuring progress. For this first cycle of equality budgeting, a number of diverse policy areas have been selected with associated objectives and indicators published in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2018 in December last. Progress towards achieving these targets has been reported on in the Public Service Performance Report 2017 published last month.

Responsibility for proofing expenditure programmes, the selection of indicators, and making progress towards achieving the high level goals articulated is a matter for the individual spending Departments in the first instance. The role of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is to facilitate the initiative and provide support for Departments to fulfil the Programme for Government commitment.

The pilot programme of equality budgeting is to be reviewed, with learnings from the pilot approach used to expand the initiative to other expenditure programmes and equality dimensions for the 2019 budgetary cycle. To further guide the roll-out of equality budgeting it is intended to establish an Equality Budgeting Steering Group. This group will be comprised of relevant stakeholders and policy experts to provide advice on the most effective way to advance the initiative.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

36. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the flood relief plans for areas in south County Kildare (details supplied); when they will be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21644/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme was the largest ever flood risk study carried out in the State and covered 300 areas believed to be at significant flood risk. The CFRAM programme culminated with the launch by me in Athlone on 3 May, 2018 of 29 Flood Risk Management Plans which proposed 118 new outline flood relief projects on top of the 42 major projects already completed and the 33 major schemes within the existing capital works programme of the Office of Public works (OPW).

I was delighted to be able to launch the Plans with the Taoiseach and to announce a major 10 year €1 billion programme of investment in flood relief measures. I also said on the day of the launch that it would not be possible to implement all of the capital projects in one go and that a phased approach was necessary. In that regard I also announced funding of €257 million for an initial phase of 50 flood relief projects throughout the country which would be progressed to detailed design and construction, including the 5 largest schemes identified in the Plans and 31 small or minor projects under €1 million which will be progressed directly by the local authorities.

Flood relief projects have been identified in the Plans for both Newbridge and Athy. Neither area is in the first tranche of projects to be progressed, but I can give my assurance that the OPW and the local authority will work closely to ensure that both will be commenced in the coming years and within the 10 year timeframe for the programme of investment.

In relation to Castledermot and Suncroft, potentially viable structural flood relief measures have been investigated and technically viable flood relief schemes have been identified. However, a more detailed assessment of the costs and benefits will have to be completed to determine if the proposed Schemes are feasible. This further assessment will commence later this year.

The allocation of almost €1 billion by the Government in the National Development Plan up to 2027 for flood risk management will allow the annual allocation for flood risk measures increase from almost €70m in 2018 to €100m per annum by 2021 and thereafter.

Shared Services

37. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to address the errors and inefficiencies in the PeoplePoint shared service system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21637/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): PeoplePoint is the Civil Service HR and pensions shared service centre – it is a processing centre for HR and pensions administration on behalf of 35,400 Civil Service customers. In 2017, PeoplePoint, now called HR Shared Services, completed in excess of 231,000 HR and pensions transactions and received over 86,000 calls and 4 million website visits. PeoplePoint applies Government HR and pension policies and procedures on behalf of its clients and all decision making remains with each Department or office. It started to provide services to a small number of Government Departments and offices in 2013, increasing this in phases over time, until it completed its es-

tablishment at the end of 2016.

The benefits of HR shared services have included the first ever online system for applying for annual leave and other forms of leave; a website providing all Civil Servants with easier and faster access to important information on entitlements and services; one set of standard HR processes, applied consistently, based on HR policy. These standard processes are eliminating local interpretation and thereby increasing fairness for everyone. The value of shared services is to standardise and optimise processes to improve service quality and to apply policy administration equally across the Civil Service whilst improving data accuracy and reporting.

A programme of continuous improvement is in place in PeoplePoint, seeking to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and includes; greater automation of business processes to reduce or eliminate errors or delay; a workflow management review and ongoing staff training and quality review programmes. A customer services group with representation from HR Managers from a number of Government Departments was also established in 2017 to support the effective delivery and future development of shared services and to ensure that the voice of the customer is fully considered. I am informed that the management team fully accepts that the service level is not yet where it needs to be to satisfy all users. As part of its continuous improvement initiatives, a major customer survey will be conducted this year to obtain full and objective information on satisfaction levels which will help to inform further targeted actions in order to achieve the highest service levels.

Ministerial Functions

38. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the statutory duties of the Minister of State with responsibility for flood relief. [17970/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Minister and Secretaries Act 1924, as amended, the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland (Board of Commissioners) and its powers, duties and functions are assigned to, and administered by, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform as the responsible head of the Board of the Commissioners to Dáil Éireann. The Ministers and Secretaries Act, 1924 designates the Minister as the corporation sole that is a perpetual entity separate from the individual Office holders.

The Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1977, provides for the delegation of a Minister's powers and Duties to Minister(s) of State by Order made by the Government at the request of the Minister concerned. Delegation from a Minister to a Minister of State of non-statutory responsibilities is generally made by way of an understanding between a Minister and Minister of State.

The Minister has delegated by way of an understanding special responsibility for the OPW and Flood Relief to the Minister of State. The Minister remains responsible to Dáil Éireann for the exercise or performance of any powers or duties delegated to the Minister of State.

EU Funding

39. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the role his departmental officials have in respect of utilising the European Structural and Investment Funds to meet Europe 2020 objectives under social inclusion. [17676/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Europe 2020 strategy document sets out specific targets under a range of objectives including employment, research and development (R&D), climate change and energy, education, and poverty and social exclusion.

The Irish targets under Europe 2020 with regard to social inclusion are to reduce:

- consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from a baseline rate of 6.3% in 2010;
- by a minimum of 200,000 the population in “combined poverty” (i.e. consistent poverty or at risk of poverty or basic deprivation) between 2010 and 2020.

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) support the delivery of these goals across Europe and in Ireland through:

- The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- The European Social Fund (ESF)
- The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)

In addition, although not part of the Structural Funds, there is support available from the European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) fund.

While as Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform I have overall policy responsibility for the European Structural and Investment Funds, my Department also has administrative responsibility for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). As regards the European Social Fund (ESF), administrative responsibility rests with the Minister for Education and Skills. The Minister for Agriculture, Food, and the Marine has administrative responsibility for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), and the Minister for Social Protection has administrative responsibility for the European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

In relation to ERDF, Ireland has been allocated €409m support for the programming period 2014-2020. It should be noted that this amount is matched with 50% Exchequer funding, therefore the total allocation for ERDF programmes is €818m. ERDF contributes to combatting social exclusion by creating employment through investing in business start-ups, and enhancing SME competitiveness.

FEAD aims to help people take their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion by addressing their most basic needs i.e. food and or basic materials for personal use. The FEAD budget for 2018 is €8m. €4.5m of this will be allocated to ongoing food distribution through the central procurement in FoodCloud Hubs. The remaining €3.5m is allocated to the distribution of material assistance in the areas of homelessness, school kits and new migrants.

Under Ireland’s EMFF OP, a community led local development initiative is being implemented through seven Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) covering all coastal areas of Ireland. The FLAGs are provided with a €12 million budget, co-financed by 50% exchequer funding, in the period 2014 - 2020, to disperse within their respective FLAG territories through grant aid to projects that contribute to the achievement of the FLAG’s Local Development Strategy. The FLAGs focus on promoting innovative approaches to create growth and jobs in their territories, and enhance the socio-economic prospects of their area, in particular by adding value to fishery and aquaculture products and diversifying the local economy of their territories towards new economic activities.

While the FLAG scheme is the most directly relevant to social inclusion, other EMFF schemes also contribute to this objective. For example, the EMFF Inshore Fisheries Scheme supported the establishment and ongoing development of representative forums for the inshore fisheries sector (i.e. the National Inshore Fisheries Forum and 7 Regional Inshore Fisheries Forums) to give voice and representation to small scale coastal fishermen from many remote areas of Ireland.

As regards the ESF, while it is required that at least 20% of the ESF resources in each Member State be allocated to the social inclusion objective, the Irish ESF Programme has gone beyond this and has in fact allocated 34%, or €388m, of the total Programme allocation of €1.157bn, to this objective. This is co-financed by 50% exchequer funding in the period 2014 - 2020.

Social inclusion activities supported include:

- the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, which tackles poverty and social exclusion;
- Youthreach which provides education, training and work experience for early school leavers;
- Garda Youth Diversion Projects, which support young people at risk of/or involved in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour;
- Young Persons Probation Projects, which engage with young offenders in local communities;
- the Tús Nua Project, to promote independent living and positive reintegration into the community for women leaving prison and women offenders referred from the community;
- the Ability Programme to promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities;
- projects to support the integration and employment of migrants; and
- gender equality projects aimed at women who are currently detached from the workforce and business women who wish to realise their full business potential.

Public Expenditure Data

40. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of the additional €2.6 billion of expenditure commitments for 2019 he outlined to the Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight on 18 April 2018 that will reduce the estimate for net fiscal space of €3.2 billion for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21620/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Table 3 on Page 22 of the Summer Economic Statement (SES) 2017 set out an amount of €3.2 billion in respect of the estimated net fiscal space for 2019. In arriving at this net amount, the fiscal space impact of certain pre-committed voted expenditure was deducted from the gross fiscal space. The nominal amounts relating to these pre-commitments were set out in Table 1.3 on Page 9 of the Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) 2017, with €0.4 billion of current expenditure in respect of demographics and €0.3 billion of capital expenditure arising from increases set out in the Public Capital Plan and from prior year budget adjustments.

The SES and the MYER did not reflect the impact of the abolition of domestic water charges and the consequent change in funding arrangements for Irish Water. Irish Water expenditure was therefore included within the overall General Government expenditure amounts in the SES, and reflected increases in relation to Irish Water's capital investment programme. With funding in respect of domestic water services now being provided through voted expenditure, €0.1 billion of the overall year-on-year increase in voted capital expenditure in 2019 arises from the change in funding arrangements for Irish Water and is therefore technical in nature. This technical change was reflected in the multi-annual capital ceilings included in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2018 published in December last year.

Consequently, of the €2.6 billion in voted expenditure pre-commitments set out in the Stability Programme Update 2018, the fiscal space impact of nominal amounts of €0.4 billion in voted current expenditure and €0.4 billion in voted capital expenditure, including the €0.1 billion in relation to Irish Water capital expenditure, were taken into account in arriving at the estimated net fiscal space amount of €3.2 billion for 2019 in last year's SES.

Table 4 on Page 23 of the SES outlines the indicative allocation of available net fiscal space for 2018-2021. This Table outlines an indicative allocation of €1.5 billion in fiscal space for expenditure in 2019, with over €0.9 billion of this amount for current expenditure and just under €0.6 billion for capital expenditure. This was the pre-Budget position and expenditure allocations made as part of the Budget Estimates process in October last year, set out in Expenditure Report 2018, utilise most of this indicative allocation.

In relation to current expenditure there are pre-commitments that arose after the SES of €0.7 billion that would need to be funded from the current expenditure fiscal space amount or from savings/reprioritisation. There is a cost of €0.4 billion arising in 2019 from the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA). This amount was not included as pre-committed expenditure in the SES or the MYER as the agreement at that stage was subject to ratification by the membership of the Public Service Unions and Staff Associations. In addition, as outlined in the Expenditure Report 2018, there was a cost estimated, at that time, of €0.2 billion in respect of the carryover impact of certain Budget 2018 measures that would need to be met from the available resources for 2019 or from savings/reprioritisation. The current estimate of the carryover impact into 2019 is €0.3 billion. This estimated carryover impact will be reviewed in the context of this year's MYER to take account of expenditure developments during the first half of this year.

In Budget 2018 last October, additional capital was allocated over the four year period 2018 to 2021 following the mid-term review of the Capital Plan. Expenditure Report 2018 set out gross voted capital expenditure amounts of €5.3 billion for 2018 and €6.6 billion for 2019. These amounts were in line with the increases set out in the MYER, with just over €0.3 billion in the pre-Budget position and just under €1 billion to be allocated as part of the Budget 2018 process. The fiscal space impact of the additional capital allocated during the Budget 2018 process is in line with the indicative allocations of fiscal space for capital grants and gross fixed capital formation of just under €0.6 billion in aggregate. Consequently, these increases fully utilise the indicative fiscal space for capital grants and gross fixed capital formation set out in the SES for 2019.

The National Development Plan revised the Departmental capital expenditure ceilings for 2019 to 2021, published in REV 2018, to facilitate the early commencement of a number of funds. The voted capital expenditure amount in the Stability Programme Update for 2019 reflects the additional funding allocated in the National Development Plan in respect of the Rural, Urban, and Innovation Funds. With the cost of the funds being partly covered by an unallocated capital reserve, the additional cost arising in 2019 is less than €0.1 billion.

Consequently, the expenditure pre-commitments outlined in the Stability Programme Update that arose after publication of last year's SES and MYER amount to €1.8 billion, with an impact on fiscal space of c. €1.4 billion after taking into account the estimated effect of the capital smoothing adjustment that applies under the Expenditure Benchmark.

The Stability Programme Update (April) 2018 provides for an increase in Voted Expenditure of €2.8 billion in 2019, including the pre-committed expenditure of €2.6 billion. After providing for this increase of €2.8 billion in Voted Expenditure, a deficit of 0.1 per cent of GDP is projected for next year.

The Summer Economic Statement will outline the fiscal parameters for Budget 2019. In setting out these parameters a key consideration is the formulation of budgetary policy, based on what is right for the economy, and that does not jeopardise the sustainability of our public finances and our future living standards.

Defence Forces Allowances

41. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a case (details supplied) is the only instance during the lifetime of the Government in which the official side has refused to honour the findings of an adjudication process administered by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; if his Department will reconsider its position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21776/18]

42. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on correspondence sent by his Department to an organisation (details supplied) on 14 December 2016 in which it indicates its refusal to honour the arbitration outcome citing FEMPI and section 5.3 of the Lansdowne Road Agreement despite the fact that these grounds for not paying the allowance were made during the adjudication process and rejected by the adjudicator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21778/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 41 and 42 together.

The Department of Defence has not refused to honour the findings of the adjudication process. The position is that there are a number of outstanding Adjudication findings, across the Public Service, which cannot be implemented at this time having regard to the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009-2015. This includes the adjudication on the NCO account holder allowance.

Paragraph 5.21 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides that the parties will commit to entering into a process to conclude by end-September 2018 which will involve engagement in relation to an appropriate, time-bound process for addressing any outstanding adjudications, having due regard to the question of their continued validity and cost implications. The review mechanism is the subject of ongoing consideration in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Military Medals

43. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if centenary medals will be awarded to former Defence Forces members of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21815/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government provided for the award of a commemorative medal to all Defence Forces personnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in the course of 2016. This was a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann who served during the centenary year of 2016. The 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal was awarded as a commemorative medal, personal to an individual's service in the Defence Forces in the course of 2016.

There are no plans to award the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal to former members of the Defence Forces. Since the foundation of the State many thousands of personnel have served in the Defence Forces. It would not be administratively possible within the resources of the Department to identify and contact all of these persons, decide on eligibility and, in the case of infirm or deceased former members, resolve who should get the medal on their behalf.

At my request, however, discussions took place between the Department and the Veterans' Associations - the Irish United Nations Veterans Association (IUNVA), the Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel (ONE), and the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO) - to explore alternative means of recognition of the contribution of veterans to the centenary commemorative events in 2016.

Following these discussions, it was agreed that a single presentation would be made to each of the Veterans Associations of a framed medal with an accompanying citation in recognition of the significant contribution of members of the three organisations to the 1916 centenary commemorative events and their service to the State. The medal has a bar with the term Veteran inscribed on it. I agreed that a plaque would be given to each of IUNVA's 21 Posts and to each of O.N.E.'s 41 Branches. I presented one plaque to each of the three Veterans' Associations at last year's Defence Forces' Veterans' Day which took place in the Defence Forces Training Centre, the Curragh, on Sunday 8th October 2017. The other plaques were presented separately.

Citizenship Applications

44. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for citizenship through the foreign birth register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21733/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department takes very seriously its responsibilities in relation to determining entitlement to Irish citizenship. The volume of applications for citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration is particularly high and applications generally take 5-6 months to process, with more complex applications sometimes taking longer.

Following receipt of an application, applicants do not normally receive any communication from my Department until the processing of the application has been completed, unless there are problems with the information or documentation submitted. Applications are processed in the order that they are received. The application in question is under consideration and the applicant will be notified once a determination in the case has been made.

Ministerial Meetings

45. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent meeting with the French Foreign Minister; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [21843/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On Sunday, 13 May I hosted Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, for a working dinner in Dublin.

We discussed the current state of play in the Brexit negotiations and I reiterated our appreciation for the solidarity shown by France on the Irish-specific issues.

We took stock of recent developments in the Middle East Peace Process and explored the prospects for progress in the coming months. Our meeting occurred before the tragic events which took place the following day.

Minister Le Drian briefed me on France's approach to the maintenance of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, in light of the decision by President Trump to withdraw from the deal.

The meeting included a discussion on EU-Africa relations and, in particular, how to enhance dialogue between Europe and Africa in order to ensure both sides can engage better on tackling challenges such as terrorism, climate change, migration and poverty.

The meeting confirmed that the bilateral relationship between us is excellent. Ireland and France have a shared, or similar, analysis of many of the foreign policy challenges we face together as members of the European Union. We also have strong historical, cultural and economic ties, and we discussed progress on the proposed electricity interconnector between the two countries. I greatly appreciate the close working relationship which Minister Le Drian and I have developed.

Middle East Issues

46. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the decision by the United States and other countries to relocate their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; the effect this will have on achieving a two-state solution; the efforts being made by the Government and the EU to restart peace talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21844/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In my statement of 6 December I set out the Government's view of the US decision to move its Embassy to Jerusalem. This was that the announcement was premature and ill-advised, and would be unhelpful to efforts to reach a resolution of the Middle East Peace Process, something which is very urgently needed. I conveyed to the US Government ahead of its announcement my concern about reports of US intentions, and I know that very many leaders around the world did the same. The announcement, when it was made, was thus very disappointing and difficult to understand.

My view that this move is mistaken and divisive remains unchanged, following the formal transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem this week. This involved essentially the move of the Ambassador's official location to the existing US Consulate building in Jerusalem. The actual transfer of the bulk of Embassy functions will await the construction of a new Embassy premises, which may be a lengthy process.

Thus far only three Central and South American countries have announced that they will follow the US move.

Ireland looks forward in due course to establishing Embassies in Jerusalem to both Israel and the future Palestinian state, following the conclusion of a peace agreement and in accordance with international law. Until then, our Embassy to Israel will remain in Tel Aviv.

Efforts to restart the peace process are currently centred on the initiative being developed by the United States. I have spoken at the Foreign Affairs Council to urge EU partners to engage with the US to encourage this initiative and to seek to shape it and ensure that it is in line with the key parameters for a settlement. I have myself met with the US team a number of times in this regard.

The US move on Jerusalem has unfortunately made this initiative more difficult, by damaging the trust of Palestinians in their approach. I hope that this can be overcome.

Foreign Policy

47. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the impact that increased US sanctions on Iran will have; the estimated impact of such sanctions on Ireland in terms of trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21845/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The United States has begun the process of reimposing those US sanctions on Iran which had been suspended under the nuclear agreement with Iran, the JCPOA, from which the US has regrettably withdrawn. They will come back into force over a period of three to six months. The US Government has also stated an intention to impose additional sanctions.

It is difficult to estimate the impact these actions will have, at this early stage.

The JCPOA was a multilateral agreement which remains in operation despite the US decision, and which retains the full support of Ireland and the EU. All the other parties to the agreement have said that they intend to continue to implement it. The UN and EU sanctions on Iran, which were directly in force in this country and which were removed under the JCPOA, will therefore not be reimposed.

The US sanctions which had caused the most difficulty for Irish firms seeking to do business in Iran were those in the financial sector, and for the most part these were not suspended under the JCPOA and had remained in operation. This had led to a continued reluctance of many European banks, including Irish banks, to handle funds originating in Iran. This had undoubtedly slowed the regrowth of trade with Iran following the JCPOA. This will continue to be a factor.

The effect of any new US sanctions cannot be estimated until they are known, but there is certainly concern at EU level over possible extra-territorial impact of US sanctions on EU firms doing business with Iran. This has already been discussed with Iran by EU Ministers this week, and will be an issue which will be followed closely at EU level in the period ahead.

Northern Ireland

48. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in implementing the Stormont House Agreement; the status of the institutions proposed to deal with legacy issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21858/18]

49. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the discussions he has held with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the activation of the legacy issues aspects of the Stormont House Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21902/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 49 together.

Dealing with long-outstanding issues relating to the legacy of the Troubles is of the utmost importance to the Government.

The Programme for a Partnership Government highlights this priority, including a specific reference to implementation of the institutional framework on the past, as provided for under the Stormont House Agreement 2014.

In the discussions at Stormont Castle on outstanding commitments that took place between March and June last year, my predecessor and I engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and all of the political parties to seek a way forward to implement the Stormont House legacy framework. This built on the progress made on legacy issues during the talks in 2015 that led to the Fresh Start Agreement.

In our recent discussions, the Secretary of State and I have agreed on the importance and urgency of achieving a definitive move forward with the establishment of the Stormont House legacy framework.

Victims and survivors have had to wait for far too long already for a suitable and effective system in Northern Ireland for dealing with legacy issues from the Troubles. In this regard, I welcomed the launch on 11 May of a public consultation by the British Government on their draft legislation to establish the legacy bodies provided for in the Stormont House Agreement.

I have also emphasised in discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the political parties the need to ensure that legacy inquests are properly resourced and I continue to raise this issue with the Secretary of State. I have urged all with responsibilities in relation to legacy inquests to move forward as quickly as possible to implement the helpful proposals of the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland.

Legislation will also be required in this jurisdiction to provide for cooperation with the Stormont House legacy bodies. The preparation of legislative proposals for consideration by the Government and the Oireachtas is being advanced by the Department of Justice and Equality in consultation with my Department.

The Government remains determined to see that there is progress in the period ahead on the Stormont House Agreement institutions, on legacy inquests in Northern Ireland and on other outstanding legacy issues, including the three all-Party Motions adopted by this House on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government and the political parties to seek an urgent move forward on these legacy issues to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors, and contribute to broader societal reconciliation as an integral part of the Peace Process.

Economic Growth

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which pay de-

mands in the public and private sectors are likely to impact on the growing economy to a negative or positive extent in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21924/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of the 2018 Stability Programme Update (SPU), my Department forecast growth in the overall pay bill (private and public combined) of 5.7 per cent in 2018. This is made up of growth in average pay of 2.6 per cent, with the remainder due to growth in the number of employees. Pay bill growth is projected to average 5.1 per cent per annum thereafter, with average pay expected to grow at around 3.0 per cent per annum.

To the extent that wage pressures exceed these projections, this could be expected to boost consumption and overall price levels in the near term. However, to the extent that such higher pay rates result in a loss of competitiveness, any positive impact will be offset by lower overall economic activity and lower numbers employed.

Work published previously by my Department titled ‘Quantification of the economic impacts of selected structural reform in Ireland’ (www.finance.gov.ie/updates/quantification-of-the-economic-impacts-of-selected-structural-reforms-in-ireland/) indicates that a 1 percentage point wage shock which is not offset by a corresponding rise in productivity could be expected to reduce the level of real output (GDP) by $\frac{1}{4}$ percentage point (pp) within 7 years, add 1pp to the rate of unemployment, and reduce the number of people employed by some 0.4 percentage points.

Insofar as the public service is concerned, the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 negotiated last year between Government as employer and public service unions and associations provides the framework for affordable adjustments in pay and industrial relations stability. The Agreement provides for the phased unwinding of FEMPI measures on a sustainable basis over the 3-year period 2018-2020 with benefits for public servants ranging from 6 to 7.4 per cent over the period - an average of 2 to 2.5 per cent per annum.

Given downside risks within the international context, it is imperative that wage developments should be commensurate with trends in productivity (output per person employed) over the coming years, in order to avoid a deterioration in Ireland’s competitiveness. We will therefore continue to monitor the wage outlook, and labour market and productivity developments.

Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base Proposals

51. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the proposal under the multiannual financial framework, MFF, programmes of a 3% call rate to be applied to a new common consolidated corporate tax base; and the steps taken to protect Irish interests from such a scenario. [21974/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, the European Commission’s proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 was published on 2 May 2018. I welcome the publication of the proposals which marks the start of an important debate on the future of the EU Budget.

The proposals are detailed and will require careful examination over the coming period, particularly as further details emerge. All relevant Government Departments will examine the full package carefully and to understand the overall implications for Ireland. Ireland will also engage constructively with European partners on these proposals.

By its nature, the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) is a complex and

detailed proposal and Member States need to fully analyse and consider its potential impact on national tax systems. Member States are discussing and debating the various aspects of the proposal in the relevant tax working parties. These discussions are at a relatively early stage and much more technical consideration is needed.

Consequently, it is premature to predetermine the outcome of Member States' discussions, and as such it would not be prudent to rely on resources not yet agreed by Member States for financing the EU budget.

Motor Insurance Costs

52. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the steps being taken to reduce costs to businesses (details supplied). [21977/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I note that the specific case which the Deputy mentions refers to a business owner seeking motor insurance at a competitive rate. The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on or review any particular case, but I will focus my reply on the Deputy's question on the steps taken within my remit to address the issue of insurance costs. 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 can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in particular cases.

In making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, insurers will use a combination of rating factors, which include the age and type of the vehicle, as well as the age of the driver, the relevant claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, the profession of the driver and how the car is used, etc. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience, meaning that in relation to particular categories, different insurance companies will have different views.

Notwithstanding this, the Cost of Insurance Working Group has published two reports, into the Cost of Motor Insurance (2017) and Employer Liability and Public Liability Insurance (2018) to address the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses alike. The Motor Report made 33 recommendations across six key themes: protecting the consumer; improving data availability; improving the personal injuries claims environment; reducing the costs in the claims process; reducing insurance fraud and uninsured driving, and promoting road safety and reducing collisions. The Employer and Public Liability Report builds on those recommendations and its 15 recommendations focus on increasing transparency, reviewing the level of damages in personal injury actions and improving the personal injuries litigation framework. Both of these reports are available on my Department's website: www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/insurance/the-cost-of-insurance-working-group/.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations made in each of these Reports and the Working Group has committed to publishing quarterly updates on its progress. The fifth such update was published on 11 May and shows that of the 50 separate deadlines set

to date within the Action Plan, 40 have been met, while substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

It is envisaged that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports’ recommendations will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and improved availability of insurance products. In relation to the cost of motor insurance, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for April 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 19% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore there are many people who may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that this greater stability in pricing will be maintained with the result that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Dog Breeding Industry

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if a dog breeding establishment (details supplied) is registered and in compliance with the Revenue Commissioners. [21743/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 9 of the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 provides that each local authority must maintain a register of dog breeding establishments located in its area of responsibility. The Act also places an obligation on any person seeking to operate a dog breeding establishment to have the premises included on the register. However, Revenue does not have any role to play under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act and is not involved in inspecting relevant establishments to ensure compliance with that legislation.

As regards taxation, the profits of any dog breeding business are liable to tax irrespective of whether it is included on a register of dog breeding establishments or not. Revenue has confirmed that it examined a number of such establishments as part of its 2017 compliance programme, most of which were found to be tax compliant with enquiries still ongoing in a small number of cases.

Taxpayer confidentiality provisions contained in section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 precludes Revenue from providing any information in regard to the specific case mentioned in the Deputy’s Question.

Motor Insurance Coverage

54. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that musicians have particular difficulty in obtaining motor insurance from motor insurance companies and in many cases are refused even a quote due to their profession; his plans to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21746/18]

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 can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to

the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of drivers or vehicles.

In making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, insurers will use a combination of rating factors, which include the age and type of the vehicle, as well as the age of the driver, the relevant claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, the profession of the driver and how the car is used, etc. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience, meaning that in relation to particular categories, different insurance companies will have different views.

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years with a related problem as referred to in the PQ being the availability of cover in the first place. These issues were the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The fifth such update was published on 11 May and shows that of the 50 separate deadlines set to date within the Action Plan, 40 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”. Further details can be found in attached link. www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/5th-Progress-Update-Q1-2018-Focus.pdf.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for April 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 19% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore I appreciate many people may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016. In addition with the full implementation of the Motor Report, I believe that Ireland will be more attractive to new entrants thus increasing capacity as well as competition which should have a positive impact in niche areas such as musicians.

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

55. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance his strategy in Europe regarding the proposal being advanced on the taxation of the digital economy; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [21787/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In March the Commission published two proposed Directives in relation to the taxation of digital economy.

The first proposal is a ‘temporary’ solution of a 3% levy on turnover from certain digital service activities. The thresholds for application of a global turnover of €750 million and EU turnover of at least €50 million.

The second, “comprehensive solution” requires an overhaul of international taxation, establishing the concept of a “digital permanent establishment”, allowing countries taxing rights over the business carried out by that entity in that country, even where the company has no physical presence in the country.

In respect of the Commission’s proposals, discussions on the technical details are at a very early stage. Unanimity is required before any proposals can be agreed at EU level.

Ireland remains committed to global tax reform and believes that global solutions are needed to ensure tax is paid by companies where value is created. That is why Ireland has been a committed participant in, and strong supporter of, tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process.

Ireland shares the view expressed in the recently published OECD Interim Report on the Digital Economy that further analysis is needed to achieve a globally agreed, evidence based solution, sustainable in the long run and focused on aligning taxing rights with the location of real substantive value creating activity.

Ireland will continue to actively engage with work in the area of the digital economy at both OECD and EU level.

Departmental Staff Data

56. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the number of assistant principal posts or equivalent in County Westmeath under his aegis; the number of employees due to retire in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21797/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Of the seventeen Bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that in the location listed by the Deputy there are seven people employed at Assistant Principal level of which one will be due to retire in the coming year.

Departmental Staff Data

57. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the number of assistant principal posts or equivalent in County Westmeath which are filled to date by employees under his aegis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21798/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Of the seventeen Bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that in the location listed by the Deputy there are seven people employed at Assistant Principal level.

Departmental Staff Data

58. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to recruit additional assistant principal posts or equivalent in County Westmeath in the next five years across all heads of Departments under his aegis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21799/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Of the seventeen Bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that in the location listed by the Deputy there are no current plans to recruit at Assistant Principal level or equivalent in the next five years.

House Prices

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if his officials are examining the practice of developers advertising residential units as price on application; the effect it has on house prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21801/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance continues to monitor developments in the residential property market, including trends in property prices. Ongoing monitoring allows my Department to assess the property sector's contribution to the economy, as well as to scrutinise potential risks emerging from the wider construction industry. The Department monitors price levels through stamp duty returns made on completed sales, as reported each month by the Central Statistics Office. As such, my Department does not make price enquiries to individual developers.

In order to improve transparency in the residential market, the Property Services Regulatory Authority publishes the Property Price Register. As a freely available public register of residential property sales, the PPR provides information on sales prices for properties at a local level. It offers more clarity for homes buyers on the prices paid for similar properties in their area and allows them to make more informed decisions.

The PSRA also regulates all Property Services Providers, including those selling residential properties. The PSRA has significant powers of sanction – up to and including the revocation of a licence – if any industry providers are found to be acting improperly in the course of their business.

Tax Code

60. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the detail of the law regarding inheritance tax for siblings that are joint owners of a home in which they live together; if there have been recent changes to the tax imposed on a surviving sibling in the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21817/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that section 86 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act (CATCA) 2003 provides for a dwelling house exemption which allows for property to be inherited tax-free where the inheritor is already living in the home subject to certain conditions. Firstly, the inherited dwelling house must have been the deceased person's principal private residence at the date of his or her death. This requirement is relaxed in situations where the deceased person had to leave the house before the date of death because of ill health; for example, to live in a nursing home. In addition, the beneficiary must not have a beneficial interest in another residential property. Finally, the beneficiary must have lived in the house for 3 years prior to the date of the inheritance and must

continue to live in the dwelling house for 6 years after the date of the inheritance.

Amendments to the dwelling house exemption in Finance Act 2016 sought to realign the exemption with its original policy objective i.e. to alleviate the hardship of an inheritance tax liability for a person who inherited a house in which he or she had been living with the deceased and to ensure that the person did not have to sell the house to pay the tax liability. Along with the requirement that the dwelling house be the principal private residence of the disposer, the changes also meant that the relief would only be available for inheritances. With one exception, it is no longer possible to receive a tax-free gift of a dwelling house. The exception is where a person gifts a dwelling house to a 'dependent relative'. For this purpose, a dependent relative is a direct relative of the donor, or of the donor's spouse or civil partner, who is permanently and totally incapacitated because of physical or mental infirmity from maintaining himself or herself or who is over the age of 65.

If a beneficiary qualifies as a 'dependent relative' then there is no requirement that the dwelling house be the principal private residence of the disposer or that the beneficiary remain in the dwelling house for 6 years after the date of the inheritance. For this purpose, a dependent relative is a direct relative of the disposer, or of the disposer's spouse or civil partner, who is permanently and totally incapacitated because of physical or mental infirmity from maintaining himself or herself or who is over the age of 65.

The dwelling house exemption applies to siblings living together as it does to any other persons living together who satisfy the qualifying conditions for the exemption. The changes made in Finance Act 2016 as described above affect all such persons.

State Aid

61. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the United States Government has sought a role in aspects of a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21846/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government profoundly disagrees with the European Commission's analysis in the Apple State Aid case.

An appeal is therefore being brought before the European Courts. Such an appeal takes the form of an application to the General Court of the European Union (GCEU), asking it to annul the Commission's Final Decision.

The Attorney General prepared the legal grounds in support of the annulment proceedings and the application was lodged in the GCEU in 2016. As is normal practice, a summary of these have been published in the Official Journal of the European Union. They were also published on the Department of Finance's website in December 2016.

The case has been granted priority status and is progressing through the various stages of private written proceedings before the GCEU. It is at the discretion of the court to determine if there will be oral proceedings, either in public or in private. It will likely be several years before the matter is ultimately settled by the European Courts.

As this is the subject of open legal proceedings, it will not be possible to comment further, in particular on any of the individual elements of the State's legal case in defence of our position. This is important to ensure that we do not prejudice our own legal case.

All Member States have legal standing to intervene in proceedings that go before the Euro-

pean Courts and do so from time-to-time if it is considered that a case raises particular points of relevance for their country. They therefore may intervene in the Irish appeal, and it is a matter for each Member State to make that decision.

Apple have also initiated their own distinct annulment proceedings in the court. As this is Apple's own legal case, it is not appropriate to comment on any proposed interventions in their case as this is a matter for the respective parties. However, I can confirm that Ireland has intervened in that case to ensure that the best possible case for Ireland is presented to the court on all matters relating to the Apple State Aid Decision.

Banking Sector Data

62. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a State-owned bank (details supplied) is seeking access to the social media of potential mortgage holders; his views on the practice; if other banks engage in the behaviour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21847/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have received the following response from AIB:

“AIB does not monitor individual customer social media accounts and as such never makes decisions using individual customer's social media data. The only individual social media data that's used by the bank is when a customer contacts us on AIB Group Social Channels and we respond to specific queries from customers as is normal practice. We do regular social listening where we monitor macro social media trends and sentiment towards our brand on social media. No individual customer data is collected or held as part of this measurement. This listening tool only uses publicly available social media data and is anonymised and aggregated to measure sentiment and macro themes rather than any specific customer comments.”

Startup Funding

63. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe for which applications for start-up relief for entrepreneurs are taking to be processed by the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21868/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurs (SURE) is a tax relief for individuals who leave full-time employment and start up their own business.

In general terms, relief under SURE is available for an individual who:

- Sets up a new company to carry out a new trade. Companies that carry on a trade previously carried out by another person do not qualify. Nor do many consulting companies, which carry on a profession rather than a trade, qualify.
- Gives up full-time employment elsewhere to take up full-time employment with the new company.
- Invests in ordinary share capital of the new company.

The relief available is based on the amount invested and the amount of tax paid, through the PAYE system, for the previous 6 years.

I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to give an average time taken to issue a decision regarding approval or rejection. In the more straightforward cases, the application will normally be processed within a month while in the more complex cases, it can take up to 6 months before processing of the application is completed.

The time taken to process a SURE application depends on a number of factors including the complexity of the corporate structure of the company concerned and the extent and completeness of the supporting documentation presented with the application when it is initially made to Revenue.

Of the 29 applications received since 1 January 2018, 13 have been the subject of additional information requests by Revenue.

As the Deputy may be aware, I announced that a review of both the EII and SURE incentives was to be carried out this year. That review is now under way and is being conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants. Amongst other matters, it will consider operational aspects of the scheme.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if extra resources have been provided to the Revenue Commissioners for the upcoming change in PAYE reporting in 2019; the amount that has been spent and will be spent on upgrading the Revenue Commissioners' systems including changes to the Revenue Online service; if extra employees will be hired for these changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21875/18]

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the Revenue Commissioners PAYE modernisation programme; the work being done to ensure that employers are fully prepared for the change; the benefits the new programme will bring from a Revenue Commissioners perspective; the impact on employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21885/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 72 together.

The implementation of the PAYE Modernisation project was announced in Budget 2017.

PAYE Modernisation represents the most significant reform of the administration of the PAYE system in over 50 years. Its objective is that employers, employees and Revenue will all have access to the most accurate and up-to-date information available relating to pay, tax, PRSI and USC deductions. This will ensure that the right amount is collected at the right time from employees, and that employers pay their correct liabilities when required. The new reporting requirements also minimise the scope for error and omission by employers.

Real-time data will assist Revenue in ensuring that employees get the full benefit of their entitlements during the year, in particular where an individual has a number of employments. Providing employees with access to the statutory deductions reported by their employer and an end of year income statement will improve the accuracy, ease of understanding and transparency of the PAYE system.

For Revenue, the availability of real-time information will inform its risk profiling, identification fraud and non-compliance activities, including assisting in the earlier identification of insolvent businesses. PAYE Modernisation will also provide the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection with more timely data regarding employments and PRSI contributions and provide greater assurance on the overall PAYE yield, which will enable better forecasting and policy decisions.

Revenue is undertaking a co-design approach to PAYE Modernisation. It has engaged with key stakeholders since the start of the project and continues to do so to ensure the design is optimised through their input. This will result in a more streamlined process and ultimately a reduction in the administrative burden for employers with pay and tax reporting being a by-product of their payroll process.

I am advised by Revenue that significant change management structures have been put in place for PAYE Modernisation. These include the following key components:

- Monthly meetings with external stakeholders that includes organisations like the Small Firms Association, ISME, IBEC, Irish Tax Institute, Chartered Accountants Ireland, Chambers Ireland, Financial Services Support Unit (under Department of Education) and accountancy firms.
- Monthly meetings with key staff representatives.
- Fortnightly or monthly meetings, as required, with the Payroll Software Developers' Association.
- Revenue has presented on PAYE Modernisation at over 170 events arranged by representative bodies, payroll software providers, tax practitioners and the Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) throughout the country.

At the end of April 2018 Revenue issued a letter to 219,000 registered employers informing them of the upcoming changes and providing them with links to detailed content on the Revenue website. This letter also provided a link to sign up for regional seminars that will be run by Revenue in September 2018. To date over 3,300 employers and agents have registered their interest in attending these seminars.

Revenue is also undertaking customer service visits to employers to help them prepare for PAYE Modernisation. These visits will focus particularly on small employers who do not have payroll software or a tax agent to help them prepare for the new reporting requirements. Revenue will undertake a media and advertising campaign later in the year to maximise the level of awareness of the changed reporting obligations under PAYE Modernisation.

I am assured by Revenue that preparations for PAYE Modernisation are well advanced. There is currently c. 100 staff in Revenue dedicated to PAYE Modernisation working on regulations, ICT development, change management and business readiness. Revenue recently recruited 40 Clerical Officers specifically to scale and develop the employer helpdesk in advance of the new employer reporting requirements. It is anticipated that Revenue will also require c.35 temporary Clerical Officers in 2018/2019 to manage a peak in business arising from the transition to the new reporting requirements and the simultaneous reporting by employers of the 2018 end of year return.

I am advised by Revenue that total project spend to date is €9.2m. At this point, total project cost for the years 2017-2019 is estimated to be between €25-€30 million. It is important to point out that this expenditure is in the context of a system that brings in almost €1 billion every month to the Exchequer.

Legislative Programme

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when legislation on limited partnerships will be introduced; the timelines for the enactment of such legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21876/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The funds industry has been a successful and significant element of the Irish financial services landscape for many years. This success has been underpinned by changes in the legislative landscape that have made Ireland an attractive domicile for promoters in Asia, across Europe, the U.S., and further afield. We also have a regulatory regime providing a robust and consistent approach to the supervision that promotes confidence in Ireland as a location for investment funds.

Due to changes in the global private equity market in both structure and relevant European legislation, there is a need to update the Investment Limited Partnership Act 1994. This objective has been included in the IFS2020 Action Plan which commits to developing amendments to the Investment Limited Partnership Act 1994 to make the structure more attractive to fund managers.

Consequently, my Department sought and obtained approval from the Government for the preparation of Heads of Bill in 2017. The Heads of Bill have been sent to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and a drafter has been assigned to work on this.

The Bill appears on the legislative programme for 2018 and it is anticipated that the draft legislation will be developed in the second half of the year with the intention for the Bill to be considered by the House before the end of this year.

Consumer Protection

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if small and medium sized enterprises are covered by the Central Bank's consumer protection code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21877/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On consultation with the Central Bank, I can confirm that the General Principles of the Consumer Protection Code (the Code) apply in respect of all customers in the State, with customer defined as:

“ any person to whom a regulated entity provides or offers to provide a product or service the subject of this Code, and any person who requests such a product or service”.

The other chapters of the Code apply in respect of customers in the State who fall within the definition of ‘consumer’. ‘Consumer’ is defined as either of the following:

- “ a *person* or *group of persons*, but not an incorporated body with an annual turnover in excess of €3 million in the previous financial year (for the avoidance of doubt a group of persons includes partnerships and other unincorporated bodies such as clubs, charities and trusts, not consisting entirely of bodies corporate); or
- incorporated bodies having an annual turnover of €3 million or less in the previous financial year (provided that such body shall not be a member of a *group* of companies having a combined turnover greater than the said €3 million).”

This includes where appropriate, a potential ‘consumer’.

Please note, however, that certain provisions of the Consumer Protection Code apply only to personal consumers, defined as

“a consumer who is a natural person acting outside his or her business, trade or profession.

However, the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 (the SME Regulations), were published in December 2015. Regulated lenders (other than credit unions) have been required to comply with the SME Regulations since 1 July 2016, and in the case of credit unions, from 1 January 2017. These Regulations replaced the existing SME Code.

The SME Regulations aim to strengthen protections for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) when borrowing from regulated lenders, while also facilitating access to credit. They also set out a framework which regulated entities must comply with when dealing with SME borrowers in arrears and financial difficulties. SMEs are enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and have an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet not exceeding €43 million.

The SME Regulations apply to regulated entities engaged in relevant activities in the State. For the purposes of the Regulations, a ‘regulated entity’ means a regulated financial service provider providing relevant activities. ‘Relevant activities’ include:

- Providing or offering to provide credit to a borrower or from which a borrower is seeking to avail of credit;
- Entering into, offering to enter into or with which a borrower has sought to enter into a credit facility agreement, to which a borrower is a party or will be a party;
- Proposing or undertaking preparatory work for entering into a credit facility agreement with a borrower and any related activities;
- Providing or offering to provide an alternative arrangement; or
- Engaging in credit servicing activities.

Motor Insurance Costs

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the next progress update will be published on the report into the cost of motor insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21878/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The *Fifth Progress Update* was published on the Department of Finance website on 11 May 2018, together with an accompanying press release. This is the first such quarterly report to provide details on the implementation of the *Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance*, as well as continuing to outline developments in respect of the *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* recommendations.

In relation to the Liability Insurance Report, all eight actions scheduled for delivery in the first quarter of the year have been fully completed. Of the four actions in the Motor Report with a Q1 2018 deadline, one has been met in full and it is expected that at least two of the other three will be concluded during the second quarter. Further details can be found in the attached link.

www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/5th-Progress-Update-Q1-2018-Focus.pdf.

The Action Plan Monitoring Dashboard for the Motor Report currently indicates that 40 of the 50 separate deadlines set thus far have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

The main reason for the delays in the actions not fully completed on time is that most of these actions relate to large and far-reaching projects involving multiple stakeholders, which can lead in many instances to significant legislative implications which need time to be adequately dealt with such as, for instance, the National Claims Information Database.

However, aside from Action Point 2, which I believe has been satisfactorily addressed through a protocol agreed with Insurance Ireland, the rest of the action points continue to be worked upon in order to complete them as soon as possible.

It is planned at this juncture that the next Quarterly Update, which will focus in particular on the 14 actions across the two Reports with Q2 2018 deadlines, will be released before the end of July.

Motor Insurance Costs

68. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if recommendation 8 of the report on the cost of motor insurance has been completed; his views on the assessment of an organisation (details supplied) that the recommendation is covered by the Central Bank’s consumer protection code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21879/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The *Fifth Progress Update*, which provides details on the implementation of the *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* recommendations, was published on the Department of Finance website on 11 May 2018. This Fifth Progress Update confirms that Action Point 17 (associated with Recommendation 8), which calls upon Insurance Ireland to put in place a general protocol around the requirement for insurance companies to notify a policyholder of claims made against them before settlement, has not yet been completed.

The background to this position is that Insurance Ireland have argued that this recommendation is achieved through the application of the Consumer Protection Code (CPC) and that a previously agreed protocol between the Irish Insurance Federation (IIF – the predecessor to Insurance Ireland) and IBEC titled *Communication Guidelines for Insurers & Policyholders* - April 2003 - has been superseded.

It should be noted that much of which was in this aforementioned protocol covers what is required to implement fully recommendation 8 and in particular addresses what is a key missing feature in the CPC i.e. the absence of any requirement for policyholders to receive appropriate communication and engagement with their insurer in relation to claims made against their policies.

As a result, the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D’Arcy TD, wrote to Insurance Ireland on this matter on 8 December 2017 to ask the insurance industry to fully implement this recommendation as soon as possible. A response to this letter was received on 3 April 2018 which reiterates Insurance Ireland’s position that the CPC is sufficient in their view.

In conclusion, it should be noted that my Department is continuing to pursue the implementation of Recommendation 8, in parallel with a related recommendation from the EL/PL Report. Options are being considered as to the best course of action for bringing the recommendations

forward, given industry's diverging opinion on the matter.

Motor Insurance Data

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of motor insurance policies entered into under the declined cases agreement in each month in 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21880/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, under the terms of the Declined Cases Agreement (DCA), which is adhered to by all motor insurers in Ireland, the insurance market will not refuse to provide insurance to an individual seeking motor insurance if he or she has approached at least three insurers and has not been able to obtain cover from them.

I am not responsible for the operation of the DCA and therefore I do not have direct access to the number of motor insurance policies entered into under the DCA process in 2017 and 2018 to date.

However, in order to be as helpful as I can, my officials contacted Insurance Ireland seeking the DCA application figures. In response, Insurance Ireland provided statistics on the number of cases it dealt with in 2017 and Q1 of 2018. In relation to these cases, Insurance Ireland has informed my officials that all applications submitted were accepted by Insurance Ireland for processing under the DCA. It has also stated that a quotation was secured for every applicant.

The month-by-month figures for 2017 are:

Month	Total
January	113
February	109
March	126
April	139
May	147
June	155
July	136
August	129
September	121
October	104
November	86
December	58

In relation to quarter 1 of 2018, there were 322 applications. I am informed that the month-by-month figures for Q1 and the figures for April will be available shortly.

Tracker Mortgage Examination Expenditure

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the costs incurred to date by the Central Bank in the tracker mortgage examination by the types of professional fees incurred and staff costs; the costs that will be reimbursed by bank in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21883/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has advised that the estimated costs incurred by the Bank in carrying out the Tracker Mortgage Examination to end December 2017 amounted to approximately €8.4m. This comprises an estimate of internal labour costs of €4.5m (but does not include an apportionment of indirect costs) and an estimate of €3.9m for directly attributable external costs (including third party external consultancies).

The Bank also indicates that, since 2016, third party external costs incurred by the Consumer Protection division of the Central Bank relating to the Examination have been ring-fenced and are recoverable in full from the entities involved. It is also worth noting that, through the Central Bank's annual Industry Funding Levy process, the overall costs of financial regulation are aggregated and charged to the industry in accordance with defined recovery rates. The rates as set out in the annual Industry Funding Regulations reflect the recovery rates as agreed with the Minister.

Insurance Industry Regulation

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that an insurance firm not in business here can enter the Irish market without barrier to entry, have access to the same databases and information as existing market players and therefore compete on a level playing field; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21884/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish insurance sector is diverse, comprising life, non-life and reinsurance firms operating across a range of products and geographical markets. I believe that it is very important that this market is competitive, vibrant and that there are no barriers to entry facing potential new entrants. If we want to increase its capacity and facilitate further competition, this must remain a key policy goal.

As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation of the sector. This framework is mainly governed by the EU Solvency II Directive, which provides for three ways in which an insurance undertaking can operate within the Irish market. These are to:

- establish a head office in Ireland (authorised by Central Bank of Ireland);
- establish a branch in Ireland through Freedom of Establishment (FOE); or
- operate on a Freedom of Services basis (FOS).

My understanding is that there are companies operating in each of these channels in the Irish insurance market. The Solvency II framework is designed to allow for a level playing field across the European Union for insurers, not only in terms of access to markets within the EU, but also with regard to the level of supervision and regulation. In the context of my functions around the legal framework governing financial regulation, I am satisfied that insurers can compete on a level playing field.

In relation to the Insurance Ireland operated Insurance Link database I am aware that there are some membership criteria for new entrants. Having said that, this is something that I have no control over.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the Group's Report on the Cost of Employer Liability and Public Liability insurance have made a number of recommendations that are relevant to the issue of supporting a level playing field. In this regard the insurance fraud database recommendation

requires that it be available to all insurers participating in the Irish market for fraud detection purposes. It is hoped that this recommendation, along with other recommendations made in the field of transparency and the reduction of claims related costs in particular, should encourage competition and potential new entrants.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 64.

Summer Economic Statement

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to publish the summer economic statement 2018. [21886/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The publication of the Summer Economic Statement (SES), forms a key part of the reformed budgetary process designed to complement the Stability Programme Update (SPU). The macroeconomic outlook set out in April, as part of the SPU, will underpin the SES. The SES will broadly set out what the Government believes to be the appropriate fiscal policy next year, taking into account Ireland's stage in the economic cycle.

Whilst the economy is forecast to continue to grow strongly over the coming years, the SES will reflect the need to avoid any policy measures which could contribute to overheating in the economy. As a small open economy we are exposed to a number of external risks, particularly in relation to Brexit, changes in the international tax landscape and rising geopolitical tensions, all of which have the potential to destabilise our economy. The Government is cognisant of these risks and recognises the need to plan for the future and manage our resources in a prudent fashion. Given the uncertainty we face over the coming years we need to continue to focus on enhancing our competitiveness and building up resilience in our public finances.

I aim to publish the Summer Economic Statement in the Summer.

Consular Services Expenditure

74. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of consultancy services, value for money and policy review expenses incurred by his Department as at 31 December 2017. [21891/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The table outlines the amount paid to consultancy firms by my Department during 2017. My Department ensures that every effort is made to limit the use of consultancy where possible. It should be noted that the complex nature of the Department's work in recent years in leading major reform programmes, such as the roll-out of shared services by the National Shared Services Office or the transformation of the central procurement function under the Office of Government Procurement, means that it is necessary for the Department to bring in external expertise from time to time. All contracts are negotiated with a view to achieving best value for money and are kept under review to ensure this is maintained. When the use of consultants is unavoidable, the staff in my Department ensure appropriate skills transfer to reduce the requirement for consultants going forward.

My Department actively ensures that funds appropriated to it by Dáil Éireann are spent in a manner that supports the achievement of the best possible value-for-money. Consequently, each Division in my Department examines and reviews capital, consultancy and information

technology project expenditure on a regular basis. This process is formalised through the collation of bi-annual value for money reports on such projects.

Consultant	Purpose	Cost
Accenture	Build to Share (OGCIO)	€34,440
Accenture	Build to Share (OGCIO)	€10,762
Accenture	Build to Share (OGCIO)	€51,660
Accenture UK Ltd	Robotic process automation process analysis, HSE and passport office	€13,214
Achilles Procurement Service	Strategic Advice (OGP)	€32,643
Agency Assessments Ireland	EMA bid - Consultancy services (OGP)	€861
Analysys Mason	Mobile voice and data sourcing strategy report (OGP)	€26,912
Aspira	Expert analysis and advice on implementation of eCohesion System	€79,824
Astron	Review of system design and operation of eCohesion IT system	€22,140
Bearing Point	Service supply contract research into technical, operational, market and procurement considerations into implementation of a future Human Capital Management system for the Civil Service	€71,401
Bearing Point	ICT common services evaluation (OGP)	€18,450
Bearing Point	ICT common services evaluation (OGP)	€24,600
Bearing Point	Expert advisory services to the Single Scheme Administration Project (Design phase)	€95,854
Bid Management Services	Professional Services (Bid Manager) (OGP)	€61,474
Byrne Wallace	Consult on employment law	€119,433
Coyne Research Associates	Research consultancy (OGP)	€11,162
Deloitte	Financial management shared service project / GDPR assessment services (NSSO)	€1,553,960
Empirica	Strategic Advice (OGP)	€59,427
Ernst & Young	Diversity and Inclusion diagnostic for the Department	€14,452
Ernst & Young	Continuity and Resilience	€24,465
Eversheds	Legal advice (OGP)	€94,620
Fehily Timoney & Co.	Environmental consultancy	€12,300
Fehily Timoney & Co.	Environmental consultancy	€24,600
Fehily Timoney & Co.	Environmental consultancy	€18,450

Consultant	Purpose	Cost
Gartner	Research and Advisory Services (OGCIO)	€182,655
Gartner Ireland Ltd	Strategic Advice (OGP)	€127,428
Genfour Limited	Robotic process automation needs analysis Peoplepoint	€6,600
Greenville Procurement Partners	Strategic Advice (OGP)	€2,085
Horizon Energy Group	Strategic Advice (OGP)	€238,326
Innovative Procurement Solutions Ltd	Procurement support and advice (OGP)	€59,497
KPMG	Build to Share business case (OGCIO)	€92,250
KPMG	Advisory services on data centre hosting of Government cloud infrastructure (OGCIO)	€23,757
KPMG	Advisory services on data centre hosting of Government cloud infrastructure (OGCIO)	€99,999
KPMG	Peer review of actuarial work completed	€15,000
Milliman	Actuarial Consulting Services	€22,755
Oiliúna	Technical consultancy (OGP)	€2,000
Praesta Ireland Ltd	Business Planning consultancy (OGP)	€19,680
Price Waterhouse Cooper	Operational support and strategic advisory (OGP)	€44,526
Prof. Edel Conway & Dr. Yseult Freeney	Academic advice services to the Public Service Pay Commission	€1,900
Research Matters Ltd	Strategic Advice (OGP)	€23,979
Ryan Hanley Consulting Engineers	EIS of river Fealge Clonakilty	€6,285
The Friday Agency	ICT - www.eufunds.gov.ie	€15,141
Version 1 Software	ICT - Contingency system development and implementation	€22,071
Ward Solutions	Security Consultancy fees (OGCIO)	€3,321

OGCIO - Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

OGP - Office of Government Procurement

NSSO - National Shared Services Office

National Planning Framework

75. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures contained within the national planning framework that will help to avert the impending fines for missing Ireland's 2020 renewable energy targets; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [21980/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Planning Framework is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. Compliance with 2020 renewable energy targets is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. However, as my Department has been involved in both processes I will address the Deputy's question.

In the first instance it should be noted that there are no "impending fines".

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. While good progress has been made to date, meeting the target remains challenging. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's most recent assessment is that Ireland will achieve between 13.2% and 15.4% of the 16% renewable energy target by 2020 - or, to put it another way, we will be between 82% and 96% of the way towards the target.

Failing to achieve our 2020 target under this Directive could give rise to the usual penalty applied by the Commission when a Member State breaches a Directive – infringement proceedings. It is only when an infringement proceeding reaches the stage of 2nd referral to the European Court of Justice that the Commission might ask the Court to impose fines.

However the Renewable Energy Directive also provides a framework for Member States to work together towards renewable energy targets. This includes mechanisms which allow Member States to meet their targets by purchasing credits - or what are termed statistical transfers - from Member States that overachieve on their renewable targets.

How much this will cost depends on two factors – price and quantity. How much will we miss our target by and what price will other Member States be prepared to sell to us at. Because of the uncertainty inherent in each of these factors it cannot be definitively said how much this purchase of compliance will cost.

Work undertaken by the SEAI in 2016 indicated that the cost to Ireland of not meeting our overall renewable energy targets may be in the range of €65 million to €130 million for each percentage point Ireland falls short of the overall 16% renewable energy target. However, present indications, based on a trade agreed by other Member States late last year, suggest that the cost per percentage point for statistical transfers is likely to be below the lower end of the range suggested by SEAI.

Contingency planning to explore the potential extent, mechanisms and cost of addressing our target within the framework of the Directive is underway between officials in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and my Department

With regard to the National Planning Framework, one of the key objectives of that document is to make our planning system more responsive to our national environmental challenges. It commits the Government to integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation. This plan will be complemented by the forthcoming Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework which will aim to identify strategic areas for the sustainable development of renewable electricity projects and by new Wind Energy Guidelines which will facilitate informed decision making in relation to onshore renewable energy infrastructure.

Cross-Border Projects

76. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has had discussions with the British Government and with the European Commission on the need to ensure the continuation of funding for cross-Border projects post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21055/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland and Northern Ireland are currently partners in two EU-funded cross-border Cooperation Programmes, PEACE and INTERREG, with a total value of €550 million over the period 2014-2020. These programmes are 85% funded by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the European Union's Cohesion Policy.

The Irish Government remains firmly committed to the successful implementation of the current programmes and to successor programmes post-2020.

Work on this objective commenced as soon as the outcome of the UK referendum on EU membership was known. Shortly after the referendum I met the then Finance Minister in Northern Ireland, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, and we agreed to write to the EU's Regional Policy Commissioner, Corina Crețu, to highlight the importance we attach to the programmes. I subsequently raised the programmes at the Cohesion General Affairs Council and met Commissioner Crețu to discuss them. Throughout this period my officials have also been engaging with their European Commission counterparts.

I was pleased, therefore, that the Irish Government's ambitions for the programmes were reflected in December's EU-UK Joint Report on Brexit in which both parties undertake to honour their commitments to the two programmes under the current MFF and to examine the possibilities for future support favourably.

I am also pleased that the Commission has now brought forward proposals for future programmes in its proposals for the EU budget post-2020. My officials and I will continue to work with the Commission and our EU partners to ensure the continuation of these important programmes post-2020. The future of these EU-funded programmes are part of the ongoing work of the Barnier Task Force, and negotiations with the UK will take place in that context.

Garda Recruitment

77. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21869/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware recruitment for An Garda Síochána is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Garda Commissioner in the first instance.

Recruitment for an Garda Síochána is undertaken by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) which is an independent recruiter for the civil and some parts of the public service.

I understand that while the Public Appointments Service conducts the initial competitive selection stages for Garda Trainee on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, eligibility requirements are set out in the Garda Síochána (Admissions & Appointments) Regulations, 2013. This includes a requirement for applicants to have proven proficiency in two languages, one of which must be Irish or English.

In cases where candidates do not have the required proven proficiency Irish or English e.g. have not achieved a minimum of Grade D in Ordinary Level at the Leaving Certificate, and

have qualified at Stage 3 (interview) of the selection process, the Public Appointment Service affords those candidates an opportunity to undergo an alternative written and oral language test. The written and oral language test process is an alternative route for the candidate to demonstrate proficiency in the language if they do not have it in the Leaving Certificate.

However, the written and oral language test is analogous to the Leaving Cert in that candidates have only one opportunity to demonstrate proficiency. The recruitment process to Garda Trainee is a competitive one. It is not appropriate in the context of a competitive recruitment process to afford a candidate additional opportunities to complete elements of the assessment process. It is however open to individuals to apply again for subsequent Garda Trainee competitions, if they continue to be eligible.

Public Procurement Regulations

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which public procurement and reform thereto continues to be part of Government policy with particular reference to the need to ensure maximum economic benefit whilst maintaining good procurement practice and indigenous resourcing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21921/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules and guidelines. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

Procurement reform is a key element of the Government's overall reform programme and is aimed at delivering increased value for money, and having a strategic approach to public procurement across the public sector.

A key element of the reform programme has been to ensure it is being carried out in a manner that recognises the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises as the engine room of our economy. The aim is to drive fair, transparent and open competition in the marketplace but also to work with business to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly.

The Government has committed in the Programme for a Partnership Government to refining the new procurement structures in place and to make adjustments according to best international practice and in conjunction with Irish business.

My colleague, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan chairs the SME Advisory Group in accordance with the Programme for Government. He hears at first hand the concerns of industry at these quarterly meetings. Representatives include the OGP, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland (EI), InterTrade Ireland (ITI), the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC), the Small Firms Association (SFA), the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Chambers Ireland and the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME).

Minister of State O'Donovan also launched the OGP's *Public Service Spend and Tender Analysis Report for 2015* report last September. This is the OGP's third annual report that analyses expenditure and tendering activity on goods, services and minor works across public service bodies in Ireland. I would point out that the analysis is encouraging, indicating that 94% of the State's expenditure is with firms within the State.

Finally, it is also important to remember that open tendering is a two way street and that it provides Irish companies with opportunities to compete abroad. Public expenditure on goods, works, and services representing approximately 14% of EU GDP with an annual value in the order of €2 trillion. The open market regime offers opportunities for Irish companies to win business abroad and EU studies indicate that many Irish businesses are successful in this regard.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the role he expects for reform throughout the public sector to impact on economic performance in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21922/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The public service is central to economic and social life in Ireland. Significant reforms have been made in recent years and have made the work of the public service more transparent, decision-making more accountable and service delivery more effective and efficient. There has been much progress since the first reform programme was started in 2011, in areas including procurement, shared services and civil service renewal, and public service reform continues to play a key role in Ireland's development.

Our Public Service 2020, which I launched last December, is a new policy framework designed to build on these previous reforms while expanding the scope of reform to focus more on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. I am confident that *Our Public Service 2020* will contribute to the strengthening and further development of our economy over the period of its implementation.

A Public Service Leadership Board comprising Secretary General and CEO level participants from across the civil and public service has also been established to drive the reform agenda and lead on its implementation. This approach will support and enable public servants and their organisations to perform at their best and to work together to deliver high-quality, value-for-money outcomes that will benefit the economy.

As Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform I must ensure that our fiscal and public expenditure policy is prudent and sustainable. There are a number of budgetary reforms introduced in recent years to guide my decisions on overall fiscal policy in this regard, including fiscal rules, expenditure ceilings and spending reviews. The actions in *Our Public Service 2020* will ensure that the focus of the public service is very much on delivery of quality public services, while operating within these prudent limits.

Our Public Service 2020 contains an added focus on evaluation and on the importance of building a reform evaluation culture. The newly established Reform Evaluation Unit will work closely with other units within my Department focusing on performance budgeting and spending reviews to strengthen the links between expenditure and reform. This will take place alongside the work of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) which leads a programme of evaluation of public service delivery across the public service. A series of rolling, selective reviews, which will cover the totality of Government spending over a three-year period to 2019, started in 2017.

Fiscal Policy

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

extent to which he is satisfied of being able to continue to meet the targets set in the context of spending and reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21923/18]

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which each Department continues to maintain good practice in terms of expenditure in keeping with both the effects of the economic recession and the growing demands of the recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21925/18]

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he remains satisfied that targets in respect of savings and public expenditure reform will continue to be met in the context of economic recovery; if he has identified particular areas of conflict in this regard; if he remains satisfied that economic recovery and retention of public expenditure objectives are not mutually exclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21926/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 to 82, inclusive, together.

Managing the delivery of public services within allocations and meeting our budgetary targets forms a key part of the responsibilities of every Minister and Department. My own Department is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is reported on each month against expenditure profiles, in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, total gross voted expenditure at end-April 2018 was €19,216 million. This is €74 million, or 0.4% below profile. Gross voted current expenditure of €18,084 million, is €192 million, or 1.1% ahead of profile. Timing issues relating to Child Benefit and Garda Pension payments, profiled for payment at the start of May but brought forward to April, account for the significant portion of this variance. As outlined in the April Fiscal Monitor, this arose as the Trans-European Automated Real-time Gross settlement Express Transfer (TARGET) system was closed on the first of May due to the European Public Holiday. These timing issues will reverse in May. Health expenditure of €5,152 million was 1.4% above profile.

Gross voted capital expenditure of €1,132 million, is €266 million, or 19% below profile and up €190 million, or 20.1% on April 2017. Capital expenditure in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is running €158 million or 43% behind profile, largely due to a delay in drawing down payments to Irish Water. It is anticipated that these drawdowns will be completed in the coming months bringing expenditure back in line with profile.

As the Deputy will be aware, sound public finances are necessary to underpin sustainable economic growth in the context of our economic recovery. This requires effective and efficient management of overall expenditure. To support this goal, my Department has been engaging with a range of Departments on year two of the Spending Review process, with a view to reinforcing a systematic analysis of existing spending programmes, focusing on an assessment of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

In addition to this, the Public Service Performance Report was published last month and this aims to strengthen focus on what is being delivered with public funds. Performance targets are published in the Revised Estimates Volume each year. This report, provides timely quantitative performance data to help to enhance the focus on performance and delivery by presenting relevant performance indicators in a dedicated, focused document.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he envisages recruitment in specific vital areas of the public sector to become a policy initiative in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21927/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching policy responsibility for workforce planning in the Civil Service, including recruitment.

The initiation of a recruitment campaign for any particular civil service grade is determined by such factors as identified workforce planning requirements and the need to establish priorities for targeted recruitment into the civil service to meet specific service and skill needs.

As the Deputy will recall in Budget 2015, it was announced that there would be a targeted programme of recruitment into the Civil Service to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills.

This ongoing recruitment programme supports Action 8 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, to “open up recruitment and promotion processes at all levels”. Under the Renewal Plan the established policy of open competition for senior management positions (Assistant Principal and higher) has been extended following a hearing at the Civil Service Arbitration Board.

I understand from the Public Appointments Service, who are the independent recruiter for the civil service, that since then in the region of 8,175 civil servants, excluding temporary assignments, have been assigned to Government departments and offices across all general service grades from open competitions. These increases would be offset by people leaving the Civil Service including retirements.

Further consideration will be given to recruitment in the civil service for the remainder of 2018 and 2019.

Recruitment plans for the public service more generally are a matter, in the first instance, for the Minister with responsibility for each of the relevant sectors of the public service.

Capital Expenditure Programme

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which his Department has received communication from other Departments and bodies or agencies under their aegis seeking expenditure on such issues as upgrade of motorways, new roadworks, investment in water and other items of infrastructural importance; if he expects to be in a position to respond favourably to such requests in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21929/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Managing the delivery of capital expenditure on issues of infrastructural importance within the allocations agreed in the recently published National Development Plan 2018-2027 is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department. My Department is in regular contact with all other Departments and offices to ensure that capital expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters and there is regular reporting to Government on expenditure levels.

It should also be noted that the capital allocations made in Budget 2018 and the National Development Plan were informed by the extensive evidence base collated and published on the

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website in 2017 as part of the mid-term review of the previous capital plan.

Issues raised by the Deputy, such as the upgrade of motorways, new roadworks, investment in water and other items, were address as part of that process. The mid-term review included a macroeconomic analysis, an assessment of progress on delivery of the 2015 Capital Plan, Departmental submissions, a public consultation process, an infrastructure capacity and demand analysis and an examination of the resourcing available for increased investment. In addition to this, a review of PPPs was undertaken as well as a Public Investment Management Assessment by the International Monetary Fund.

In the National Development Plan, all Departments' capital programmes are now fully funded for a 5-year period covering 2018-2022, which will facilitate Departments in planning their investment programmes over the medium term.

Any further communication with Departments in relation to additional capital expenditure for items of infrastructural importance will take place in the context of rolling-on the 5 year capital ceilings in Budget 2019, to include a new fifth year - i.e. 2023.

Brexit Issues

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he can take steps to minimising the impact of Brexit on the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21930/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Prudent management of the public finances in order to ensure that Ireland's economy continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds is the best and most immediate policy under the Government's control to counter the likely negative economic impacts of Brexit.

In Budget 2017 the Government took important steps to prepare the economy. Additional resources were quickly provided to Enterprise Ireland, IDA and Bord Bia to provide critical support to companies and to help them deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling.

Budget 2018 is continuing the work of getting Ireland Brexit ready. Based on the assessment of what is now required to continue preparing the economy for the challenges it faces, the Budget contained measures to improve the competitiveness of our personal taxation system; introduce a new €300 million Brexit loan scheme for SMEs; further the establishment of the Rainy Day Fund to strengthen our finances in a changing world; allocate additional capital expenditure of €4.3 billion over the next four years; increase education spending for 2018 to over €10 billion so as to keep our economy competitive and attract investment post-Brexit; increase resources for the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine to over €1.5 billion and so support Ireland's largest indigenous industry; and increase the allocation for the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation to provide for additional staff in the Department and the enterprise agencies.

Brexit will also be a critical factor in our longer-term economic strategy. Good long-term planning supported by investment in Ireland's public capital infrastructure has a very important role to play in ensuring the resilience of Ireland's economy. The National Development Plan demonstrates the Government's commitment to meeting Ireland's infrastructure and investment needs over a ten year period. It will assist in future-proofing the economy and safeguarding economic growth from the risks and uncertainties of Brexit. It will improve our competitive-

ness and resilience and enhance our ability to continue to attract and maintain business.

The NDP comprises an investment programme of €116 billion. Investments which will be particularly relevant to Brexit include integration of transport, energy and communications networks; new resources for tourism development and promotion; and supporting Brexit-exposed firms to diversify international markets.

Counselling Services Provision

86. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planned investment in mental health counselling at second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21735/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department promotes a comprehensive and whole of school approach to the promotion of wellbeing and positive mental health. This approach considers the entire school community, as well as focussing on groups and individual young people with identified need. This approach spans the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support, pastoral care, guidance counselling and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves accessing other supports such as educational psychology services and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Additionally, schools engage in a wide range of sport and cultural activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth. The whole staff shares responsibility for general student wellbeing.

At post-primary level the Well-being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) provide a framework for schools to present in an integrated way the existing elements of good practice to promote social and emotional learning, and mental health and direct then to appropriate practice. They provide clear information for schools and for agencies supporting schools on how to address issues of social emotional learning and mental health promotion. The European wide HSE supported, Health Promoting School Process (HSP) is also outlined, and the Well-being Guidelines show how the HSP can be introduced to schools to complement existing good practice. The Guidelines outline how schools support young people through early intervention and prevention, modelled on the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Continuum of Support tiered approach.

The processes outlined span the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and guidance and counselling services, and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Schools also engage in a wide range of sport and cultural co-curricular activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth.

The key message of the Guidelines are that Schools play a vital role in providing a protective environment for young people which can promote wellbeing, pupil resilience and counter-act risk factors through a whole-school approach.

Where difficulties do arise in relation to pupil mental health it promote the development of structures to promote awareness and recognition of such difficulties and provide the appropriate support including input by the Guidance Counsellor and where necessary and appropriate to support student access, in conjunction with parents to referral pathways within HSE and other

mental health services in their local community (e.g., HSE Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or Clinical / Community Care Psychology).

My Department's Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 affords particular priority to the support of wellbeing and mental health structures and supports in all schools. These include:

- Publishing a Wellbeing Policy Statement in 2018 and commencing, as resources permit, a national programme to support all schools to implement the national Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) and Wellbeing in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015)

- Implementing the new Junior Certificate area of learning entitled Wellbeing

- Extending Pupil Resilience and Teacher Classroom Management Programmes to all DEIS schools

- Increasing the capacity of NEPS by 65 educational psychologists to deliver an enhanced educational psychological service to schools

- Enhancing Guidance Counselling at second level

- Undertaking an assessment of the supports to schools in areas of mental health and well-being with a view to providing an enhanced and better integrated service

- Working closely with the Department of Health and others departments on the National Task Force on Youth Mental Health.

The Counselling and Guidance Counselling professions are two separate professions with their own unique roles and set of professional competences. Guidance in schools refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.

Counselling is a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis. Counselling has as its objective the empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing. Counselling in schools may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these.

Personal counselling in this regard should be recognised as a direct support to students experiencing mental health difficulties which may in certain circumstances operate as a pre-cursor to or in tandem with clinical or formal therapeutic counselling services provided by outside HSE agencies.

As the Deputy may be aware this Government has restored some 500 guidance posts to post-primary schools previously withdrawn in 2012.

As stated previously the school Guidance Counsellor is an integral part of the wellbeing support structure within post primary schools and therefore the restoration of the 500 posts provide additional support to the student body generally in terms of school guidance plans but also in relation to direct individual counselling support to students in crisis.

87. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding is available to Irish and EU citizens living both in and outside of the EU who wish to undertake postgraduate study; if there are special provisions or exceptions which may apply to Irish citizens living abroad and that work full-time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21742/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position is that in order to qualify for funding towards tuition fees, students must be first-time undergraduates, hold *inter alia* EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course. Where undergraduate students do not qualify for free fees they are required to pay fees to the higher education institution at either an 'EU rate' or a higher 'Non-EU rate'.

My Department does not provide free fees or core funding for postgraduate programmes. The criteria governing the level of tuition fees to be charged in the case of postgraduate study is solely a matter for each of the higher education institutions to determine in accordance with its own criteria as an autonomous body.

Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

The Deputy will be aware that additional funding of €4 million was secured in Budget 2017 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants, from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students. A further €3m was secured in Budget 2018.

Postgraduate students who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme for the 2018/19 academic year are eligible for a maintenance grant of up to €5,915; the income threshold for this grant is €23,500. Qualifying postgraduate students may also be eligible to have their tuition fees paid up to a maximum fee limit of €6,270.

Alternatively a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of his/her fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500. The student grant scheme does not extend to postgraduate courses pursued outside of Ireland.

My Department also provides funding for the Student Assistance Fund (SAF). The fund is available in various publicly funded higher education institutions. The SAF provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards their rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. The SAF is open to full-time registered students on courses of not less than one year's duration leading to an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification.

Tax relief is available on postgraduate tuition fees paid and details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners.

Student Support Schemes

88. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if legal aid is prohibited from taking a test case on a point of law as per section 21(6) of the Student Support Act 2011. [21768/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that Section 21(6) of the Student Support Act 2011, provides for a person who is aggrieved by a determination of the Appeals Board, to appeal to the High Court against that determination on

a specified point of law.

The question of legal aid is a matter for the Legal Aid Board. Details of the services provided by the Legal Aid Board can be accessed at www.legalaidboard.ie.

Student Grant Scheme

89. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding their eligibility in terms of the change of circumstances criteria for SUSI has not been responded to satisfactorily by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21769/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A number of correspondences have been received by my Department from the individual referred to by the Deputy, all of which have been responded to.

Applications for a maintenance grant are means tested based on the reckonable income from the previous tax year. However, article 32 of the Student Grant Scheme provides for a review of eligibility during the academic year, if there is a permanent change in circumstance in respect of certain criteria specified in the scheme. Applicants must provide satisfactory documentation to confirm that the reduction in income is permanent. In this instance, due to the unpredictable nature of the fluctuations in exchange rates, the drop in reckonable income in 2016 was not considered a change in circumstances that was likely to continue for the duration of the course.

The person to which the Deputy refers, has exhausted all of the relevant appeals processes in relation to a student grant for the 2016/17 academic year.

Following the full appeals process, a person who is aggrieved by a determination of the Appeals Board, can appeal to the High Court on a specified point of law under Section 21(6) of the Student Support Act 2011. The individual concerned has been advised of this option.

In terms of other supports, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may also be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education, including approved postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners on www.revenue.ie.

Schools Building Projects Status

90. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the extension to a school (details supplied); the actions his Department is taking to ensure its completion for the school year 2018/2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21770/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The contract for the project to which the Deputy refers was terminated on 8 May last by the contracting authority which is the local Education and Training Board.

The Design Team is currently preparing schedules of work to complete the project which will require to be tendered when available. Finishing out the project is being given the highest priority in the Department and by the ETB and its Design Teams.

In this regard, the Department has asked the ETB for a critical time path for the completion and both the ETB and the Department will be considering how each stage in that critical path can be delivered as quickly as possible.

Special Educational Needs Data

91. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of extra students in a new building for a school (details supplied). [21790/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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 new school building project 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 with a General Purpose Room and ancillary accommodation.

The National Council for Special Education has advised that the additional placements this project will deliver will meet the projected need for students with ASD and complex needs requiring a special school placement in the area.

Schools Building Projects Status

92. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21796/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project at the school to which the Deputy refers is progressing and the research and design stages are substantially complete as is the tender documentation. Currently pre-tender cost estimates are being finalised in compliance with my Departments Design Team Procedures and public procurement requirements.

The Pre-Qualification stage has also been completed and suitably qualified contractors have been selected. On this basis, my Department expects the project to be able to proceed to tender this coming July.

Schools Site Acquisitions

93. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a site has been purchased for a new school (details supplied); if not, the progress that has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21816/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A building project for the new post-primary school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's current 6 year construction programme.

Officials from my Department have been working closely with Limerick City and County

Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites in order to identify and procure a suitable site for the school.

A number of potential site options were identified and negotiations are being progressed.

While a site acquisition process is underway, given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to comment further at this time. However, Educate Together (the patron of the school) will be informed of the location as soon as it is possible to do so.

The task of sourcing temporary accommodation for the post-primary school to which the Deputy refers, which is due to open in September 2018, is ongoing at present. Educate Together are working on identifying suitable temporary accommodation to facilitate the opening of the school for September 2018 and my Department is providing assistance in this regard.

Schools Building Projects Status

94. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied); when stage 2B approval will be granted and the project progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21819/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project at the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2b.

According to the Stage 2b documentation submitted in November 2017, the estimated stage 2b cost plan increased substantially from the approved costs at stage 2a.

In accordance with Departmental Design Team Procedures, where the approved cost limits have been exceeded, a Brief Change Report is necessary.

Upon review of the Brief Change, my Department requested further detailed information from the Design Team, in particular a stand-alone Civil and Structural Consultants report with regard to the magnitude of the increases in the substructure requirements of this project.

Following a review of this latest Brief Change report, officials from the Professional and Technical team are meeting with the Design Team.

Until the Brief Change Report has been approved, the Stage 2b documentation cannot be reviewed.

Teacher Recruitment

95. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has received an application for an extra teacher for a school (details supplied) which is expected to have the necessary number of students enrolled at the start of the school to require a fifth teacher; when a decision will be made on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21824/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing

schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the appeal process and application form are available in Circular 0010/2018, “Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2018/19 School Year”, which is published on the Department website.

My Department has received a staffing appeal from the school referred to by the Deputy. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board will meet to review appeals for the 2018/19 school year in the coming weeks and the school will be notified of the outcome of the appeal.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Schools Building Projects Status

96. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (details supplied) in County Limerick; the estimated time of completion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21827/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers is being devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board. My Department is currently preparing a Service Level Agreement for issue to the ETB to underpin the project delivery. This is expected to issue shortly. Once this formality has been completed, the next steps are for the ETB to appoint a Design Team to design the project and to bring it on through the planning permission and tender and construction stages. It will be a matter for the ETB to progress all aspects of the project, including the appointment of a Design Team, as quickly as possible.

Third Level Funding

97. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new higher education funding model will be introduced; and if there will be winners and losers resulting therefrom. [21830/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): An independent Expert Panel was appointed by the HEA in 2016 to review the current allocation model for funding higher education and to make recommendations on the most appropriate funding model for the future. I approved and published this report in January 2018.

The review of the Funding Model provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, that incentivises actions in key strategic areas, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy.

The implementation group has been established and a terms of reference for the group has been agreed. It is comprised of representatives from DES, HEA, DPER, THEA & IUA. Key immediate priorities being considered by the Group include:

- the financial penalties system for serious governance breaches
- the design of the new Innovation fund
- the development of criteria for additional funding for multi-campus provision
- agreement of a terms of reference for a review of the costing model for higher education institutes

Some of the other recommendations will require a lead in time, to allow for the type of consultation and approval necessary. This is reflected in the fact that some recommendations are scheduled for implementation throughout 2019 and 2020.

A number of recommendations will impact directly on the final funding model and distribution for the Higher Education Sector, including the promotion of research and innovation, re-weighting for STEM, part time courses and access. Until all applicable components have been modelled and designed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in consultation with my Department and the Implementation Group it is not possible to comment on the potential impact on individual institutes.

Research Students

98. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a framework for career progression for researchers in universities will be introduced. [21831/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Innovation 2020, Ireland's strategy for Research and Development, Science and Technology proposes the development of a national policy on structured progression for researchers to help them maximise their potential.

The Irish Universities Association has been developing the proposed framework and has consulted policy makers and research funders. It is envisaged that their work on the framework will be finalised this year. When fully completed, the framework for researcher careers will bring clarity and certainty to the career structure and provide researchers with developmental opportunities to enhance their skills and employability, whether it be in academia, in the enterprise sector or the wider economy.

Gender Equality

99. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if legislation will be needed to implement gender equity measures in the third level sector. [21832/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher Education institutions in Ireland are covered by the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2011, which outlaw discrimination on gender grounds. In addition, under the Universities Act 1997 and the Institute of Technology Acts, higher education institutions are responsible for promoting equality, including gender equality, within their institutions.

The HEA's National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions highlighted the importance of achieving gender equality in higher education institutions as a "means to maximise their pursuit of excellence and successfully meet the many social, economic and cultural challenges of the future". The Gender Equality Taskforce, which was appointed in No-

vember 2017, is overseeing a national systems review of the recruitment and promotion policies and practices currently in place in higher education institutions, with a view to identifying good practice and highlighting areas that need improvement. Their report is expected shortly.

Third Level Institutions

100. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a new third level institution will be established during the lifetime of the National Development Plan 2018-2027 to cater to demographics. [21833/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Strategy on Higher Education to 2030, which was published in 2011 by the then Tánaiste Mary Coughlan, stated that there was no case for the establishment of any new universities in Ireland on the basis set out in Section 9 of the Universities Act 1997.

The National Planning Framework includes a national objective regarding the expansion and consolidation of higher education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development and programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas where skills gaps are identified. The framework seeks to prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with educational investment. The National Development Plan 2018 – 2027 also emphasises investment in higher education in the regions to underpin economic and employment growth.

The higher education sector will see a very significant ramping up of investment in infrastructure in existing higher education institutions, from approximately €800 million over the past decade to €2.2 billion over the coming decade. This will cater for the growth in enrolments due to demographic changes, improve the quality of provision and build competitiveness at the national and regional level, through ensuring a pool of relevant skills. In October 2016, it was announced that new buildings across 11 Institutes of Technology would be included in a PPP Programme for the higher education sector. It is projected that the buildings will deliver a total of 8,000 new student places and will significantly enhance the capacity of those institutions to meet regional and national skills needs. The Government is also investing significantly in the Dublin Institute of Technology Grangegorman campus with the sod being turned on a €220m building project on 30 April 2018.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Technological Universities Act was signed into law on 19 March 2018. The development of technological universities has the potential to deliver social and economic benefits to their regions through a strengthened role in research and innovation and the delivery of a broad range of high quality education and training in each of their campuses.

Other than the potential establishment of technological universities under the 2018 Act, there are no proposals at this time for any new higher education institution to be established to cater specifically for demographic growth.

Third Level Funding

101. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide the necessary funding for third level institutions; the amount identified in the Cassells report in this regard; and his views on the requirements for funding set out therein. [21834/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society. The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding (Cassells Report) which was published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of potential policy approaches for consideration.

While Cassells deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education we also have to consider the immediate challenges. In advance of receiving the recommendations of the joint committee, the government has moved to increase funding into the sector. We have therefore prioritised this area in Budgets 2017 and 2018.

As a result, my Department is investing €100m more in higher education in 2018 compared to 2016. Separate to this is the provision which I have made for pay restoration costs in 2018. We will seek to build on this progress in Budget 2019. This additional funding will allow for targeted initiatives in higher education including skills programmes, performance and innovation funding, technological university development and apprenticeship costs in the sector. It will also allow for places to be provided for 2,100 additional students in 2018.

As part of Budget 2018, the Government decided to raise the National Training Fund levy by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8% and by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020. The increase in funding from the National Training Fund is a key strategic element of the overall funding increase for higher and further education.

In addition, In January I published an independent review of the current allocation model for funding higher education which provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, incentivises actions in key strategic areas such as research and STEM provision, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy.

This comprehensive approach is being taken in order to contribute to the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the sector. As such, it will be important to build broad political and societal consensus on achieving the most appropriate future funding model and my Department and I continue to work to that end.

Schools Amalgamation

102. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in the context of a rearrangement of schools in locations (details supplied), extra supports will be provided to the schools concerned in view of the unique circumstances, particularly the split campus nature, of one of the schools. [21835/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department agreed to the proposed amalgamation of Scoil Bhride Girls and Scoil Phadraig Naofa and also the re-organisation of Presentation Primary School and St. Joseph's CBS from the start of the school year 2018/19. The proposal was agreed subject to all 5 primary school including Scoil Oilibheir Naofa agreeing a Common Application and Enrolment Policy and having a commitment to grow naturally. The Patron also agreed to ensure that all schools will not act outside the remit of the Common Application and Enrolment Policy and on this basis, schools will not be allowed to develop at the expense of other schools.

My Department has, for the first time, introduced an objective, statistics based model for deciding which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest concentrated

levels of disadvantage. My Department will be in touch with the schools concerned shortly regarding DEIS status.

The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The criteria for the appointment of an administrative deputy principal to a school, which are enrolment related, are set out in Appendix B of Circular, 0010/2018. There is no scope to deviate from these arrangements.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The general approach taken in cases of amalgamation is that the existing staff of the pre-amalgamation schools can remain in the newly amalgamated school. Where this results in the newly amalgamated school having more staff than that warranted by the staffing schedule, a concessionary allocation is given to the school to allow all of the teachers remain in place. The concessionary post is only retained until such time as one of the existing cohort of teachers leaves the newly amalgamated school and, as such, is not a permanent allocation but is a temporary measure to assist in the amalgamation process.

School Staff

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in Dublin 13 will continue to have an administrative principal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21836/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The criteria for the appointment of an administrative principal to a school, which are enrolment related, are set out in Appendix B of Circular, 0010/2018. The school referred to by the Deputy does not meet this criteria. There is no scope to deviate from these arrangements.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

School Accommodation Provision

104. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the replacement of a portakabin; if the application will be expedited in view of the need for extra accommodation at the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21860/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application from the school referred to for the replacement of prefabricated 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.

School Management

105. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet with a group (details supplied) to discuss issues regarding the rules governing the allocation of release days to teaching principals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21916/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Circular 12/2016, which is available on the Department website, outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

Building on measures in previous budgets to enhance school leadership, Budget 2018 made €0.4 million available to fund additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding will see an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year.

Enabling teaching principals to have one release day per week would cost approximately €12 million per annum.

I recently announced an extension to the arrangements for schools with teaching principals to cluster their release days into full-time posts, with one teacher covering the release days of all the schools in the cluster. Up to 50 principal release cluster posts will be put in place for the 2018/19 school year. Such arrangements will provide consistency in substitute cover and allow principals to plan their administrative days effectively.

Any invitations or meeting requests can be forwarded to diary@education.gov.ie and they will be considered.

Brexit Supports

106. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is preparing or has completed a formal application to the European Commission seeking an adaptation to the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund to enable it to be used and ensure exposed companies can avail of grant aid from the economic fallout of Brexit. [21976/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) is an EU co-funding instrument to assist workers who are made redundant as a result of globalisation or due to a global financial and economic crisis. To be eligible for assistance there must be at least 500 redundancies in a specific company (including suppliers / downstream producers) in a 4 month period, or at least 500 redundancies in a specific sector in a 9 month period. In small labour markets or in exceptional circumstances, applications can be made where the minimum threshold number of redundancies is not entirely met and the Member State can substantiate that there is a serious impact on employment and the local, regional or national economy.

The package of measures that can be co-financed by the EGF include personalised active labour market measures targeted at the redundant workers. Before an application for EGF as-

sistance can be submitted to the EU Commission, the redundancies in question must have been announced by the enterprise(s) concerned.

While the EGF could potentially assist workers made redundant following Brexit, there is no scope under the existing regulatory framework for the EGF to be used to support companies at risk. There are a range of measures being put in place to support companies impacted by Brexit, such as the Brexit Loan Scheme, the Brexit SME Scorecard and the Be Prepared Grant. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation are examining the potential for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme while the EU Commission has approved a rescue and restructuring scheme which can be drawn on in exceptional circumstances for companies severely affected by Brexit.

Immigration Policy

107. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the right to work of non-EEA citizens here who are partners or spouses of Irish citizens. [21737/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to non-EEA nationals who have applied to come to Ireland or remain here by virtue of being a spouse or partner of an Irish national and not by any other basis. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that immediate family members of Irish citizens who apply and are granted immigration status by INIS through the family reunification process have the right to work without employment permits and to establish or manage/operate a business in the State. They should receive a "stamp 4" immigration permission. Further details of the relevant Domestic Residence Schemes can be found on the INIS website under the heading of 'Family, spouses & partners' at <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/immigration-permissions>.

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.

Garda Deployment

108. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the methodology used by the Garda Training College for the purpose of determining the allocation of new Garda recruits to Garda divisions and individual Garda stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21780/18]

109. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria employed for the purpose of determining if a Garda station can be assigned new Garda recruits; if the number of existing gardaí employed at a station, station grade, vehicle numbers and so on are all discernible factors which are taken into account when making such a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21781/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 109 together.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. In addition, as the Deputy will appreciate, in order to deliver an effective policing service, it is essential that Garda management have the flexibility to deploy Garda resources to meet operational policing needs and address critical issues as they arise. For this reason, the number of Garda available in any one Garda Station on a particular day is subject to the operational requirements of the overall Division.

I am further informed that the Cohort model of resource allocation is currently utilised for the allocation of personnel within An Garda Síochána, including newly attested probationer Gardaí from the Garda College. The allocation and transfer of Garda Personnel using the Cohort Model is determined by a number of factors, including crime and non-crime workload, minimum establishment, population, area, policing arrangements, operational strategies and transfers applications, including welfare issues. When allocations are taking place, comprehensive consultation is carried out with Local Management during which all factors are taken into consideration. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly.

In relation to the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, it is important to keep in mind that they have a further 16 months of practical and classroom based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that while not all Garda Stations are training stations it is important to note that the allocation of probationer Gardaí to a Divisional training station facilitates the reassignment of Gardaí to other stations within the Division, if required, by the Divisional Officer.

Garda Deployment

110. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda division in each of the years from 2012 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21782/18]

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

these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that on the 30 April 2018, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of An Garda Síochána was 13,632. There are also 562 Garda Reserves and more than 2,280 civilians attached to An Garda Síochána.

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

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, some 400 of whom have already done so. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

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

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

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

Due to the moratorium on recruitment there were no attestations in the period 2012-2014. For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following table the Garda Divisions to which new recruits have been allocated from 2015 to date in 2018 as advised by the Commissioner:

Probationer Garda Allocations by Division - 2015 to 2018

DIVISION	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
D.M.R. EAST	9	19	37	5	70
D.M.R. NORTH	19	34	70	17	140
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	22	44	69	35	170
D.M.R. SOUTH	19	33	66	18	136
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	21	42	78	19	160
D.M.R. WEST	29	35	73	18	155
KILDARE	14	19	47	5	85
LAOIS / OFFALY	9	20	42	5	76
MEATH	5	19	30	5	59
WESTMEATH	5	5	22	0	32
WICKLOW	7		19	5	31
CAVAN / MONAGHAN	10	8	22	13	53
DONEGAL	10	5	13	4	32
LOUTH	10	17	34	8	69
SLIGO / LEITRIM	5	5	8	0	18
KILKENNY/CARLOW	9	10	30	4	53
TIPPERARY	5	14	21	4	44
WATERFORD	14	10	30	7	61
WEXFORD	14	10	34	6	64
CORK CITY	7	5	26	10	48
CORK NORTH	0	5	15	0	20
CORK WEST	5		15	0	20
KERRY	9	0	17	3	29
LIMERICK	9	17	18	9	53
CLARE	10	5	10	4	29
GALWAY	5	5	10	2	22
MAYO	5		14	0	19
ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD		5	10	0	15
Totals	286	391	880	206	1763

Garda Deployment

111. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda station in the Donegal division in each of the years 2012 to 2017, and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21783/18]

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

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that, as of 30 April 2018, the latest date for which figures are available, the strength of the Donegal Division was 394. There are also 14 Garda Reserves and 35 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. 32 members of this cohort have been assigned to the Donegal Division. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College; some 400 of whom have already done so. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year. Further, Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

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

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

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

The number of newly attested Gardaí allocated to the Donegal Division in 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018 is as set out in the following table:

New recruits assigned to Donegal 2015 -2018

DIVISION	STATION	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL
DONE-GAL	LETTER-KENNY	10	5	13	4	32

Insurance Fraud

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeline for an organisation (details supplied) and An Garda Síochána to provide a cost-benefit analysis for the establishment of a Garda anti-fraud unit under recommendation 26 of the report on the cost of motor insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21882/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Recommendation 26 of the ‘Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance’, published in January 2017, relates to exploring the potential for further cooperation between the insurance sector and An Garda Síochána regarding insurance fraud investigation. Specifically, this involves considering the feasibility of establishing a specialised and dedicated insurance fraud unit within An Garda Síochána, funded by industry.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) has engaged with Insurance Ireland, submitting a mechanism for further cooperation and a costed proposal to Insurance Ireland in the latter half of 2017. Insurance Ireland has agreed to explore the proposal further, subject to a full cost benefit analysis, to be carried out by Insurance Ireland’s Chief Financial Officers Working Group. The intention is that such a dedicated Garda unit would be funded by Insurance Ireland members and non-members alike, i.e. all entities writing non-life insurance business in Ireland.

As I informed the Deputy recently, further progress on this recommendation is dependent upon the outcome of this cost benefit analysis, which is currently awaited. Insurance Ireland has indicated that it expects to be in a position to provide an update in this regard by the end of June 2018.

Any proposed agreed mechanism will, of course, ultimately be subject to the approval of the Garda Commissioner and myself, as Minister for Justice and Equality.

Private Security Industry Regulation

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the regulatory context that applies to the use of private investigators by financial services firms here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21887/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Private Security Authority, established under the Private Security Services Act 2004 (as amended), is the statutory body with responsibility for the licensing and regulation of private investigators in the State. The Authority is an independent body under the aegis of my Department and I have no involvement in its day to day operations. The licensing of Private Investigators commenced on 1 November 2015.

A Private Investigator whose services are engaged by any person or organisation including a financial services firm must hold a Private Investigators Licence from the Private Security Authority and the licensee must adhere to the requirements of the Authority’s Standard for Private

Wards of Court

114. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the recommendation of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality report on wards of court requesting a comprehensive and independent audit of the cases identified by a group (details supplied) will be implemented to ensure that optimum protection is afforded to all previous and current wards of court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21890/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Report on Wards of Court of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality recommended that a comprehensive audit be conducted of cases identified by the group referenced which they believe had funds significantly depleted during the financial crisis 2007–2009.

As the Deputy will be aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that following its appearance before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality on 11 October 2017, the Courts Service considered how it could further assist the Committee in its deliberations and a letter issued to the Committee offering to commission an independent audit of the cases identified. In commissioning this audit the Courts Service offered to engage with the group and take on board any data it wished to have included in this audit. This offer was declined at that time.

The Courts Service decided, however, in the interests of transparency and good governance to proceed with the independent audit and the Committee was informed accordingly. Following a competitive procurement process in December 2017, Mazars, a leading international audit firm and with no previous involvement in the management or audit of court funds was appointed to conduct the audit. It commenced its independent review of 63 cases in January 2018. In conducting this audit, Mazars was given unrestricted access to all financial records in relation to these cases and the audit was conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (Ireland).

Mazars has completed their review and their report has been made available to the group, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, the Public Accounts Committee and to my Department.

The Courts Service has advised that the review shows that there were no significant losses incurred by these cases during the financial crisis and that virtually all of these cases had net realised gains when units were sold. The very significant investment returns from investment performance extended the available funds to meet ongoing care and maintenance for these cases by a considerably longer period of time than would have been the case if these cases had not been invested in the Growth Fund.

Investment of court funds is carried out in line with the strategies devised and reviewed on a regular basis by the Investment Committee, chaired by the President of the High Court. The Investment Committee reviews the investment strategies with the assistance of its investment advisors to ensure the protection and suitable investment of funds of wards, minors and others lodged in court for the benefit of those persons. Investment policies and orders made thereunder must be in accordance with the Trustee (Authorised Investments) Act 1958.

The Courts Service has advised that a conservative investment policy is being operated. When deciding where and how to invest court funds, the overriding objective is the achievement of an optimal total financial return having regard to the need for liquidity and capital security, taking account of income generation and capital growth requirements. Where there is a requirement to generate a higher return to sustain the value of the funds for the longest period possible, such funds are invested in longer term growth and income generating strategies.

The Courts Service has further advised that a prudent approach to investing court funds is adopted and takes only measured and appropriate risks, based on independent investment advice, in the best interests of all beneficiaries. The Courts Service has informed me that the independent review carried out by Mazars, and the review carried out by Aon Hewitt in 2016 as well as the annual independent external audits over many years, found no evidence of negligence or mismanagement of funds.

Probate Data

115. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff per district probate office in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21899/18]

116. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the budget of each probate office in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21900/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 and 116 together.

The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in 14 provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has advised that the Probate Office is funded and resourced from the overall budget allocation made to the Superior Courts Directorate which has responsibility for the administration of this Office. There is no specific budget allocation for the Probate Office and therefore it is not possible to provide the budgetary data requested by the Deputy.

The Courts Service has further advised that District Probate Registries operate as an integral part of each relevant Combined Court Office. All Combined Court Offices provide services within the overall budget allocation provided to the Circuit and District Court Directorate which has overall responsibility for the management and administration of that budget across all offices within the Directorate, including the District probate function. There is no specific budget allocation for the administration of probate services in District Probate Registries and therefore it is not possible to provide the budgetary data requested by the Deputy.

The Courts Service has informed me that the number of staff currently assigned to the Probate Office is 21.5, which includes an increase of 5.5 staff to this Office in the last 12 months to address delays in the processing of probate applications.

The Courts Service has also informed me that the staffing of the District Probate Registries forms part of the overall staff structure within the Combined Court Office. Staff are allocated to Combined Court Offices on the basis of the entire spectrum of services provided, including

the delivery of probate services. The allocation of staff resources within an office at any given time is a matter for the local office manager based on business priorities and demands, particularly in relation to the support of the judiciary in the administration of justice. It is therefore not possible to provide the Deputy with data in relation to the actual number of staff assigned to probate duties in any given year.

However, as the Deputy may be aware, the Courts Service has recently completed a review of the delivery of probate services and a plan is now being developed to implement the recommendations on a phased basis. The Report has been forwarded to my Department and published on the Courts Service Website.

As part of the information gathering exercise undertaken as part of the review, the Courts Service undertook an assessment of the number of Full Time Equivalent staff assigned to Probate duties in each of the District Probate Registries. The current staffing position is provided in the table. The County Registrar fulfils the role of District Probate Registrar and has an input into the administration of the Probate function in each office.

Staffing in District Probate Registries

Office	Counties served	Number of staff for probate - (Full Time Equivalent)
Cavan	Cavan, Longford	0.4
Dundalk	Louth, Monaghan	1.3
Mullingar	Westmeath, Offaly	0.7
Clonmel	Tipperary	1
Kilkenny	Kilkenny, Carlow, Laois	0.8
Waterford	Waterford	0.8
Wexford	Wexford	0.9
Cork	Cork	2.6
Kerry	Kerry	0.8
Limerick	Limerick, Clare	1.6
Sligo	Sligo, Leitrim	0.75
Galway	Galway, Roscommon	1.5
Letterkenny	Donegal	1
Castlebar	Mayo	1.25

Legislative Programme

117. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the independent commission on information retrieval Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21903/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the establishment of the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR) arises as one element of the framework of measures agreed in the Stormont House Agreement of 2014

The purpose of the ICIR will be to facilitate, in a systematic way, the private disclosure of information to the families of those victims who died as a result of troubles-related violence. The ICIR will require parallel implementing legislation here and in the UK.

Work is at an advanced stage in my Department on the preparation of proposals for legisla-

tion to give effect to the establishment of the ICIR. I intend to seek the approval of the Government to draft the appropriate legislation in the near future.

Rights of Way Registration

118. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to extend the period for registering rights of way or otherwise amending the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21906/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that section 38 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 was amended by section 38 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 in order to extend from 3 years to 12 years the period for registering rights of way acquired by prescription based on a user period under the law applicable before commencement of the 2009 Act. While I have no plans at present to further amend the 2009 Act, the operation of the law in this area is being kept under review by my Department.

Prison Service

119. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps taken by the Irish Prison Service to advise prisoners of their right to vote in the upcoming referendum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21917/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service (IPS) that considerable efforts have been made to facilitate prisoner voting.

The IPS has fully complied with the provisions of the Electoral Amendment Act 2006 in the context of facilitating prisoner voting in general and local elections and referenda, as follows:

Information on voting is contained in the induction packs presented to all prisoners on committal. Prison officials have worked closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in producing an information leaflet for prisoners on prisoner voting. This leaflet is widely available in all prisons.

All prisons have a stock of ballot application forms available to prisoners on request.

All prisons have a designated official who has been appointed under the provisions of the Electoral Amendment Act 2006 with responsibility for the facilitation of prisoner postal voting.

Prisoners have access to a range of media forms including newspapers, radio and TV through which they are kept informed of current affairs. The extensive educational facilities available in the various institutions also play a role in this process of increasing prisoner awareness of political developments. Both the library service and the educational services in the prisons play a valuable role in increasing awareness among prisoners of their rights in this area.

Family Reunification Applications

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to previous parliamentary questions and the respective replies thereto in the case of a person (de-

tails supplied), if a new application for permission for family reunification is likely to receive consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21931/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the spouse of the person referred to is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 20 June 2002.

Representations were received, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, including all representations made around family reunification, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 9 November 2017.

As previously stated, having checked records in INIS, there are no outstanding Family Reunification applications in respect of the person concerned.

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

Immigration Status

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a stamp 4 update will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); if all details requested from the person have been received in the relevant section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21934/18]

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 was granted temporary permission to remain in the State in 2001. This permission was renewed on a regular basis with the latest permission due to expire on 26 August 2018. The latest permission was granted awaiting the presentation of a new passport from the person concerned. I am advised that this new passport was presented on 5 April 2018 at the Garda National Immigration Bureau headquarters in Burgh Quay. The passport of the person concerned has been referred to an external service provider for verification. On completion of this process, INIS will contact the person concerned in reference to future registration.

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.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the appropriate procedure to regularise residence here in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [21935/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the individual in question should write to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 outlining their current circumstances and should include the following documents:

1. Full copy of their passport
2. Copy of their GNIB card
3. Copy of previous employment permits
4. Current employment situation i.e. details of any proposed employer
5. Details of any other family or dependents in the State

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

Naturalisation Applications

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all the required documentation requested by the relevant section of his Department has been supplied by a person (details supplied) in order to facilitate their application for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21936/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going and I understand that the case is due to be submitted for decision very shortly.

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

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

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

Immigration Status

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21937/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Immigration Status

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); if they can appeal the recent decision under the aegis of the International Protection Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21938/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office www.ipo.gov.ie.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the

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

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21939/18]

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 had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further three year period, to 06 May 2018. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 06 May 2015.

The renewal decision letter referred to, advised the person concerned of the requirement that they apply for further renewal of their permission to remain, two weeks before their existing permission expired, to their local Immigration Registration Office.

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.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21940/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): If an application for International Protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or their designated legal advisor should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

Similarly, the International Protection Appeals Tribunal operate an email service which can be contacted by individuals with any queries regarding their application info@protectionappeals.ie.

Under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international protection applicant. The offence is punishable by summary conviction to a Class A fine or a term of imprisonment of 12 months or both.

An applicant may appeal a recommendation by an international protection officer that the applicant should not be given a refugee declaration and/or a recommendation that the applicant should not be given a subsidiary protection declaration to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal.

Where an international protection officer recommends that an applicant should be given neither a refugee nor a subsidiary protection declaration, the Minister will consider in accordance with section 49 of the International Protection Act 2015 whether to give the applicant concerned a permission to remain in the State.

Where the Tribunal affirms a recommendation that the applicant should not be given a refugee declaration and a recommendation that the applicant should not be given a subsidiary protection declaration, the Minister will, upon becoming aware of a change in circumstances or receiving new information from an applicant that had it been in the possession of the Minister when making such decision would have been relevant to that decision, review the decision in relation to permission to remain in the State.

The Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015 on 27 February 2017, which is available on the website of the International Protection Office www.ipd.gov.ie.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21942/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determining the long term residency status and naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21943/18]

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 referred to by the Deputy had permission to remain in the State until 30 November 2015. The person concerned has no permission to be in the State since that date and has not submitted a request for such a permission.

The person concerned should be aware that it is illegal for them, under the Immigration Act 2004, to remain in the State without the permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable, under Section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

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.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21944/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

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

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

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

Residency Permits

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when consideration will be given to the long-term residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21948/18]

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

request for permission to remain in the State in respect of the person mentioned by the Deputy.

As the Deputy may be aware this case was among a large number of cases held by my Department pending the outcome of the Supreme Court judgment in respect of the cases of Luximon and Balchand which were finalised on 24 April 2018. INIS state that it may take some time to assess the above mentioned applications and ask if the person concerned might bear with them whilst undertaking this task.

The consideration of the person's application has not yet been completed and, if further documentation or clarification of any matter related to the application is required from the person concerned, INIS will write to them requesting same.

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

Visa Applications

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to previous parliamentary questions and the replies thereto in the case of a person (details supplied) if the ban on Libyan nationals is to be lifted in the near future and that they must return to Italy permanently to see their spouse notwithstanding the need for their professional expertise here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21949/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the categories of applicants who may be considered for visa processing has been extended in recent days following a review of the restrictions in place up to that point.

As previously advised, it is open to the applicant to make a fresh application including all supporting information or documentation they wish to have taken into consideration. As indicated in my response to previous parliamentary questions, I would suggest that this avenue be pursued.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to *visamail@justice.ie*.

Immigration Status

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21950/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that from the limited information provided, it is not possible to identify the person concerned.

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

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

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

Residency Permits

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21951/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that from the limited information provided, it is not possible to identify the person concerned.

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

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

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the

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

Immigration Status

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for stamp 4 can be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21952/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As previously indicated in my response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No. 198 of 19 April 2018 (ref. 17378/18), I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they do not offer specific advice to individuals on immigration pathways. In this regard the person concerned should be advised to write to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 in order to allow for a full examination of their circumstances.

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

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21953/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the applicant can expect to hear from us shortly in regards to their residency status. It can be also noted that the applicant would have received notification of their appeal on 25 April 2018 and would be aware of the outcome.

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

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and prospects for the future in the case of a person (details supplied); if the case can be

reconsidered in view of their long stay here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21954/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 11 March 2005. This order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the deportation order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). All relevant aspects of the case will be considered before a decision is made.

The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing deportation order ‘affirmed’ or ‘revoked’. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

The person concerned was required to ‘present’ at the Offices of the Garda National Immigration Bureau on 7 April 2005, to make arrangements for his deportation from the State. The person concerned failed to ‘present’ on that occasion and is therefore recorded as a person who is evading deportation.

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

Immigration Status

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) can be awarded stamp 4 status in view of the fact that they have worked here for several years; if their case can be urgently reconsidered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21955/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this case relates to a person who brought a Judicial Review to the High Court. As the case is still *sub judice* I do not propose to comment further at this time.

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

Personal Injury Claims

139. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation

when the second report from the Personal Injuries Commission will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21881/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) was established in January 2017 by the then Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, with former President of the High Court, Mr Justice Nicholas Kearns appointed as chair.

The PIC produced its first Report which was approved by Government and published on 7 December 2017. The Report recommends that the Quebec Task Force (QTF) Whiplash Associated Disorder (WAD) grading scale should be used going forward by all medical professionals reporting on relevant injuries. These are internationally recognised scales based on severity of symptoms and associated physical signs. A standardised medical reporting template is included in the Report.

The Report recommends that training and accreditation of medical professionals who complete personal injury medical reports should be promoted.

The Report also recommends the linking of future publications of the Book of Quantum to the newly standardised examination and reporting injury categories.

Finally, the Report recommends that relevant injury data should be collated and published by appropriate bodies. The Commission also suggests that there may be merit that data available from insurers relating to the incidence of ‘whiplash’ soft-tissue injuries, forms part of the National Claims Information Database which is being developed by the Central Bank of Ireland.

The next Report of the Personal Injuries Commission will predominately deal with benchmarking of Irish awards with international awards. Independent consultants have been engaged to carry out the data validation/verification of the data received and work with the Personal Injuries Commission on the benchmarking exercise. This Report is expected in June/July 2018 subject to the completion of the validation/verification exercise and will include any recommendations arising from the deliberations of the Commission. The Report will be the Final Report as the second and third reports will be merged.

When the Final Report is submitted to me, I intend to bring it to Government for approval and publication soon after.

Legislative Programme

140. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to transpose the EU’s trade secret directive, EU Directive 2016/943, into law; the timescale for same; if Dáil Éireann will have an opportunity to debate the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21729/18]

141. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has considered the experience of other member states in transposing into law the EU’s trade secret directive, EU Directive 2016/943; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21731/18]

142. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of submissions her Department has received in relation to the recent public consultation on the transposition of the trade secret directive, EU Directive 2016/943; if the

submissions will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21732/18]

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department's work on transposing the EU trade secret directive, EU Directive 2016/943, will involve amendments to existing legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21865/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 to 143, inclusive, together.

The Trade Secrets Directive is due to be transposed by all Member States by 9 June 2018 and the drafting of the Statutory Instrument to give effect to the Directive is at an advanced stage. My Department has been working in close consultation with the Office of the Parliamentary Council to ensure that the final result gives full effect to the Directive and this will involve amending existing primary legislation.

My Department issued a consultation document in June of 2017. Three submissions were received. There are no plans to publish those submissions at this time.

As regards other Member States experiences, the draft Directive was discussed at length by all Member States before being finalised. As common and civil law differs across various Member States it is not practicable to compare experiences in transposition, given that some Member States would have more amendments to make to their existing legislation. In line with all other Statutory Instruments, the European Union (Protection of Trade Secrets) Regulations 2018 will be laid, as required, under the European Communities Act, 1972.

Brexit Staff

144. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full-time and part-time staff in the dedicated Brexit unit within her Department by staff grade in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21956/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in my Department in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs, Brexit and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The Assistant Secretary is supported by a staff complement of seven (one Principal Officer, three Assistant Principal Officers, two Higher Executive Officers and one Clerical Officer). This Unit also leads on engagement with a broad range of stakeholders to inform and validate our response to Brexit.

Given the wide mission that my Department has, the UK's decision to leave the European Union continues to impact significantly on all policy fields across my Department as well as our family of Agencies. In this regard, staff expertise has been drawn from across a number of different policy areas and they have been assigned to 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.

State Aid

145. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if

she will report on the recent state aid modernisation working group meeting which took place here in April 2018; and if discussions with respect to changing state aid thresholds at EU level were held. [21957/18]

151. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has completed or is sending a formal application to Directorate General for Competition requesting that the state aid ceiling under EU Regulation No 1407/2013 be temporarily adapted as a policy response to protect vulnerable businesses that are impacted by Brexit. [21963/18]

152. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has requested other member states to support a formal application to Directorate General for Competition requesting that the state aid ceiling under EU Regulation No 1407/2013 be temporarily adapted as a policy response to protect vulnerable businesses that are impacted by Brexit; and the member states contacted on the matter since the UK referendum to leave the EU in June 2016. [21964/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145, 151 and 152 together.

The State Aid Modernisation Working Group meeting took place in Dublin on 27 April 2018 and was attended by State Aid experts from the 28 Member States. The Agenda comprised:

- Welcome speech by Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General, DBEI
- Presentation of the organisation of Ireland on State aid – State Aid Unit, DBEI
- Preparation of the next High-Level Forum: presentation by the Chair (France)
- Outcome of the monitoring exercise: presentation by the Commission
- Start-ups and scale-ups: introductory point with a presentation from Belgium
- Economic / non-economic activity and ancillary activity: presentation by the Commission, Denmark and the Netherlands

The mandate of the Group is to discuss best practice, share information and knowledge etc and this feeds into the High-Level Forum on State Aid which meets 1 – 2 times a year. It is not a policy forum and therefore it is not the forum to discuss changes to State Aid thresholds in the context of Brexit.

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

My Department is carrying out extensive work to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. In-

formed by detailed research, my Department has been putting in place a package of measures that will allow us to respond to the needs of businesses including the Brexit Loan Scheme which was launched in March 2018 and which will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future.

By using a counter guarantee from the EIB group (through its InnovFin Guarantee) means that the €24 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of €300 million. The Brexit Loan Scheme is open to businesses of fewer than 500 employees which can demonstrate that they are significantly exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of Brexit. They must be a viable business, doing business in Ireland, and they must have a business development strategy demonstrating that they plan to innovate or adapt in response to Brexit. This scheme operates within De Minimis State Aid Regulation.

On 4 May 2018 the EU Commission approved an extension to the Rescue and Restructuring Scheme for Ireland to include temporary restructuring aid. This provides a further 10 million euro of State support to those companies experiencing acute liquidity needs and is in addition to the original 10m euro announced in November 2017 under the Rescue and Restructuring scheme. Together with the Brexit Loan Scheme, this temporary restructuring aid will provide valuable stabilisation to businesses as they respond to the immediate and long-term impacts of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

My officials are also examining policy proposals for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme to support businesses to invest strategically for a post-Brexit environment and a new Business Finance Advisory Hub service which would focus on business development.

The Agencies of my Department are at the forefront in working with firms to ensure they are equipped to deal with Brexit and to enhance their performances in an increasingly competitive global trading environment through lean programmes, skills development and reducing business costs.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) has launched the 'Brexit SME Scorecard', an interactive online tool which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. EI is also offering a 'Be Prepared Grant' of up to €5,000 to support clients to develop a Brexit Action Plan and it continues to support clients to improve their competitiveness, acquire new markets and enhance management skills.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are organising workshops, seminars and training to assist companies to better understand the challenges of Brexit and have a range of supports to help clients to respond to those challenges, to become more competitive and to source new markets.

InterTrade Ireland is also working to minimise the impact of Brexit on north-south trade.

Trade Sanctions

146. Deputy Billy Kelleher asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the impact of potential new trade sanctions reported in the media (details supplied) in view of the volume of exports to Iran. [21958/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland shares the views expressed by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Fredrica Mogherini, that the EU deeply regrets the announcement by the US that it will withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which was signed by

the “E3+3” Group with Iran. The EU remains committed to the continued full and effective implementation of the JCPOA. The lifting of sanctions against Iran under the JCPOA has led to a positive impact on trade and economic relations with Iran, and its commitment to ensuring that this can continue to be delivered in the interests of improved geo-political stability.

From a trade perspective, Iran, with a population of 80 million, and a relatively wealthy middle class, is a potential market worthy of further exploration for Irish exporters. However, I share concerns that the recent announcements by the US Administration are likely to have a negative effect on this growth potential. I am particularly concerned at reports that the US may consider imposing sanctions on European companies that do business in Iran following their withdrawal from the Agreement.

According to CSO figures, Irish goods exports to Iran nearly doubled from €72 million in 2016 to €143 million in 2017, primarily due to an increase of €67m in the General Industrial Machinery Category. Overall however, exports to Iran are a very small proportion of Ireland’s total global goods exports - amounting to only 0.1% of Ireland’s total goods exports in 2017.

Ireland’s principal exports to Iran have usually been in the Medical and Pharmaceutical Products Category (exports of €26 million in 2017, which is 0.1% of Ireland’s global exports in this category); and Soft Drink Concentrate (exports of €22 million in 2017, which is 0.3% of Ireland’s global exports in this category).

Goods imports from Iran to Ireland increased from €1.6 million in 2016 to €3.5 million in 2017. These are nearly all in the sectors of fuel and vegetables/fruit. According to the CSO, there is no services trade with Iran.

Further, according to CSO data, there is no record of Iranian foreign direct investment into Ireland.

Despite the alleviation of sanctions under the JCPOA, there remain practical difficulties for Irish businesses seeking to do business in Iran. The continuance of some US financial sanctions, has meant that European banks - including Irish institutions - have been cautious with regard to engaging in financial transactions with Iran. In addition, Iran is often not included as a covered geographical territory for travel insurance and/or other types of business insurance, where the insurance company is from the US, or has a US mother company, and travelling to Iran negates the visa waiver for Irish passport holders travelling to the US.

Despite these difficulties, Enterprise Ireland (EI) continues to support the efforts of Irish companies wishing to trade with Iran, while highlighting the practical difficulties of doing business there. The primary sectors where Irish companies could potentially increase their presence since the easing of sanctions are: aviation; financial services and software; ICT telecommunications and mobile software; education services; agritech/food production; and lifesciences and pharma. EI has previously brought trade delegations to Iran, and also held a ‘Doing Business with Iran’ Event in Dublin in July 2017, which 35 EI clients attended. EI has also secured the services of an in-country Iranian market expert/pathfinder, to provide advice and assist EI clients to may encounter difficulties due to the re-imposition of sanctions or the threat of same.

As regards client companies of EI, the precise consequences arising from the very recent announcement by the US Administration of its withdrawal from the JCPOA are still being analysed and EI together with my Department will keep the impacts on those companies under review.

147. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the Addressing the Skills Needs Arising from the Potential Trade Implications of Brexit report by the expert group on future skills needs will be published in 2018. [21959/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs report on Addressing the Skills Needs Arising from the Potential Trade Implications of Brexit is expected to be published in June 2018.

Departmental Bodies Data

148. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in each of the years 2010 to 2017; the 2018 funding allocation between current and capital funding; the annual costs incurred and allocations made in each of the years 2010 to 2017; the number of part-time and full-time civil servants attached to the expert group; and the associated annual staff costs. [21960/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This PQ contains 4 parts as follows:

1. Funding allocated to the EGFSN from 2010 to 2017;2.
2. Current and capital funding allocated for 2018;
3. Annual costs incurred from 2010 to 2017 (allocations part already covered by part 1);
4. The number of civil servants (part & full-time) attached to the Group and their costs;

1. **Budget Allocations**

2010 - €604,000;

2011 - €520,000;

2012 - €420,000;

2013 - €420,000;

2014 - €490,000;

2015 - €490,000;

2016 - €490,000;

2017 - €380,000.

2. **2018** - €380,000 is allocated. Expenditure is profiled as €240,000 pay and €140,000 non-pay.

3. **Actual Expenditure (including pay referenced in Section 4)**

2010 - €401,956;

2011 - €316,516;

2012 - €361, 040;

2013 - €390,993 ;

2014 - €446,402;

2015 - €336,111;

2016 - €278,044;

2017 - €342,502

4. Civil Servant Numbers

The numbers of civil servants working in the EGFSN Secretariat in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has varied over the years. In 2017, approximately €220,000 was spent on pay of civil servants working for the EGFSN. At year end 2017, there was 1 Principal Officer (50% of time on EGFSN) and 3 Assistant Principal Officers working in the Secretariat.

Pay Expenditure

2010 - €294,456

2011 - €237,223;

2012 – €210,000 ;

2013 - €210,000;

2014 – €228,000

2015 - € 242,111;

2016 –€220,578;

2017 - €220,000.

Brexit Supports

149. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if potential businesses can apply for direct grant aid under the recently announced extension of the rescue and restructuring scheme 2017. [21961/18]

150. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports and schemes her Department has operationalised since the UK referendum to leave the EU in June 2016 that provide direct grant aid to vulnerable businesses that are impacted by Brexit as opposed to loans. [21962/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 150 together.

In November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager, the European Commissioner for Competition who has responsibility for EU State aid policy to discuss, amongst other things, the impact of Brexit on Irish businesses. An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Technical Working Group comprising representatives from DG Competition, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. An outcome of the Technical Working Group discussions has been the extension of the Irish Rescue and Restructuring (RandR) scheme to include temporary restructuring aid for enterprises facing

acute liquid needs. This provides a further 10 million euro of State support to those companies experiencing acute liquidity needs and is in addition to the original 10m euro announced in November 2017 under the R&R scheme. Under RandR guidelines, the temporary restructuring element is in the form of loans repayable over a maximum period of 18 month. However, restructuring aid under this scheme is in the form of direct grants or equity support.

My Department is carrying out extensive work to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. Informed by detailed research, my Department has been putting in place a package of measures that will allow us to respond to the needs of businesses including the Brexit Loan Scheme which was launched in April 2018 and which will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future.

My officials are also examining policy proposals for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme to support businesses to invest strategically for a post-Brexit environment and a new Business Finance Advisory Hub service which would focus on business development.

The Agencies of my Department are at the forefront in working with firms to ensure they are equipped to deal with Brexit and to enhance their performances in an increasingly competitive global trading environment through lean programmes, skills development and reducing business costs.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) has launched the 'Brexit SME Scorecard', an interactive online tool which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. EI is also offering a 'Be Prepared Grant' of up to €5,000 to support clients to develop a Brexit Action Plan and it continues to support clients to improve their competitiveness, acquire new markets and enhance management skills.

In addition, the EI has a number of other grants in place to support business. The Strategic Consultancy Grant supports the hiring of an outside consultant to assist the company in devising and/or implementing strategic initiatives aimed at improving business function and resilience. It is designed to facilitate business growth as the consultants can act as coach, mentor, facilitator, analyst, negotiator and/or operator for the company. Up to 50% of the costs incurred in hiring a consultant are available up to a maximum grant amount of €35,000.

The Market Discovery Fund provides support to companies to assist them in researching the viability of exporting an existing product/service into a new geographic market, or introducing a new product/service into an existing market. The maximum funding is 50% of eligible expenditure up to a maximum grant of €150,000.

The Agile Innovation Fund is an RD&I grant aimed at clients in sectors with rapid design cycles. It has been developed to support product, service and process innovation to enhance the competitive advantage of Irish companies. The application process is simple and quick, with a short timeframe between application and approval.

Enterprise Ireland is continuing to work with companies to help them to become more innovative. It has rolled out a number of Brexit Advisory Clinics across the country which helps companies to examine their exposure to Brexit and develop effective strategies to mitigate against that exposure. These Clinics are open to both EI clients and non-clients and are delivered free of charge. The next Clinic will take place in Dublin on June 21st at the Aviva Stadium. Topics to be covered include Financial and Currency Management, Strategic Sourcing and Customs, Transport and Logistics, Intellectual Property, Movement of People and Markets.

Enterprise Ireland has also introduced the Brexit: Act On initiative. Under the initiative an independent consultant will come to a company for two half day sessions. The consultant helps

companies to decide on specific actions that they can implement over a short period to enable them to address the risks and avail of the opportunities caused by Brexit.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are organising workshops, seminars and training to assist companies to better understand the challenges of Brexit and have a range of supports to help clients to respond to those challenges, to become more competitive and to source new markets.

InterTrade Ireland is also working to minimise the impact of Brexit on north-south trade.

Questions Nos. 151 and 152 answered with Question No. 145.

Jobs Protection

153. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to protect jobs in Russian-owned companies based here that may be threatened by increased tariffs and trade sanctions. [21965/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government is very much aware of the potential impact of these sanctions and the situation, in particular, faced by Aughinish Alumina. My Department, together with the IDA and the Departments of Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs and Trade, continue to keep the situation under careful review. I have spoken directly with the CEO of Aughinish, as has the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, and we have made it clear that the Government will do everything possible to assist the company. Similarly, the IDA has been liaising closely with the firm's senior management since details of the sanctions first emerged. The matter has also been raised through diplomatic channels with our international partners.

We understand – as has been widely reported – that efforts may be underway by the parent companies of Aughinish to restructure their respective ownerships. If this restructuring proves successful, and the US authorities expressly agree, it could result in the sanctions against the companies in question being lifted, meaning that Aughinish itself may then no longer be impacted. However, there is no guarantee that this will happen and that is why the Government will continue to engage very closely with Aughinish and provide it with all the support it can.

Brexit Supports

154. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingences and plans in place to protect enterprises and related jobs vulnerable to a hard Brexit as laid out in a media article (details supplied). [21966/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Further to my reply last month, my Department is continuing to work hard to help Irish businesses to both withstand the challenges and avail of the opportunities posed by Brexit. The long-term response to Brexit is for companies to become more competitive, more innovative and to diversify their export footprint into more markets.

I am confident that the agencies under my remit have the supports available to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK, and also to become more resilient by broadening their sales to other international markets. Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are actively supporting their clients to achieve this. My Department provided for additional monies in 2017 to enable EI and the LEOs to ramp up supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

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

Enterprise Ireland has launched several initiatives in response to Brexit, including:

- **Brexit Scorecard:** This interactive online platform can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars. Based on answers supplied by the user, the Scorecard generates an immediate report which contains suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit

- **Be Prepared Grant:** This grant offers SMEs a grant of up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an action plan for economic shocks such as Brexit. The grant can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and travel expenses associated with researching the direction of their action plan.

- **Brexit Advisory Clinics:** Enterprise Ireland held four Brexit Advisory Clinics over the past few months in Portlaoise, Mayo, Cavan and Cork. The next Clinic will be held in Dublin on 21 June in the Aviva Stadium. The purpose of these Clinics is to support companies affected by Brexit to take immediate action to address their exposure.

- **Brexit 'Act On' Programme:** A consultant spends time with EI client companies to discuss specific challenges and draw up a report with tailored recommendations that will help them address weaknesses and become more resilient.

In addition, EI is implementing extensive trade mission and event schedules focussed on global and sectoral opportunities, further developing in-market expertise and networks, placing greater focus on identifying new sectoral opportunities and stimulating demand for Irish products and services through international marketing campaigns. In 2017, EI launched a new Eurozone Strategy to increase exports to Eurozone countries by 50% by 2020.

The LEOs are supporting their clients by providing information, training and mentoring on Brexit related issues as well as advice on other sources of support. The suite of LEO Brexit supports available to micro and small businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide include.

InterTrade Ireland (ITI), has also been very active in assisting businesses address the challenges that Brexit may present for future cross-border commerce. A series of information and awareness raising events have been underway in towns across both North and South over recent months. ITI is also rolling out a 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme, which enables companies to purchase specialist advice in areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues.

Other initiatives that my Department are advancing include the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme, under which accessible finance is made available to businesses at favourable terms. I recently launched the launch of the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, which is aimed at supporting the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. Twenty-one successful applicants representing all regions of the country have secured up to €30.5m for their projects in the first competitive call.

The work of my Department is focused on supporting businesses throughout the country to withstand current challenges and succeed into the future, therefore I feel that all our efforts will put Ireland in a strong position in the event of a hard Brexit scenario.

Planning Issues

155. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the occasions since 2015 and dates on which a company (details supplied) raised the matter of the planning process for a data centre project in Athenry, County Galway with her, her predecessors and the IDA. [21967/18]

156. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of IDA plans to find land suitable for new data centres; the number of sites in each county that are being considered for same in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21968/18]

157. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the date on which her attention was drawn to planning issues regarding a data centre in Athenry; the steps she took on receipt of the information with senior departmental officials to ensure the project progressed and the investor did not pull out of the project in view of confirmation from the IDA (details supplied) that there were concerns in relation to a project due to the time it was taking to obtain planning approval. [21969/18]

158. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken to reverse the reputational damage done to Ireland's image as a location for future foreign direct investment for data centre projects and delays in the planning system; and her plans and the contingencies that will be put place by her Department and the IDA to ensure Ireland is open for business for such investments (details supplied). [21970/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 to 158, inclusive, together.

I very much regret that Apple will not be proceeding with its plans to construct a data centre in Athenry, especially as the project would have been a source of significant investment and job creation for Galway and the West of Ireland.

As with all of its clients, the IDA works with Apple to support job creation and investment in Ireland. Given the size of the investment involved, and the subsequent issues encountered by the company throughout the planning process, IDA Ireland was in regular contact with its management throughout this time. The Agency, however, had no role in the independent planning process and court challenges in respect of it.

I want to emphasise that the Government, together with IDA Ireland, did everything it could to support this investment. This included high-level engagement with the company, both at home and abroad. The Taoiseach, for example, met with the firm's senior management in the USA in November 2017, where he made it clear that the project had the support of our Government and the local community in Athenry.

Ultimately, in spite of these efforts, Apple has taken a commercial decision not to proceed, making it clear that the delays that beset this project caused them to reconsider their plans. As I have made clear, these delays have underlined our need to make the State's planning and legal processes more efficient. The Government has therefore already been working, over the last number of months, to make improvements to those processes. This will ensure that we are better placed to take advantage of future investment opportunities, whether from data centre providers or other sectors.

The Government has, for example, published legislative proposals to designate data centres as "strategic infrastructure" for planning purposes. This will ensure that future data centre-re-

lated planning applications can move more swiftly through the planning process. I am hopeful that these legislative changes can be enacted by the end of the current Dáil session.

The Government also agreed, in October 2017, to the implementation of a strengthened policy framework to support the continued development of data centres. This framework includes a number of actions which, once fully implemented, will help Ireland attract and sustain such investments in the future.

Part of this work is the development of a National Policy Statement on the role of data centres in Ireland's overall enterprise strategy. This will set out their potential to Ireland's economic development, especially in regional locations, whilst taking account of wider challenges in energy and renewable energy policy. The importance of data centres to Ireland is recognised as well in Project Ireland 2040, which makes clear that the promotion of Ireland as a sustainable international destination for information and communications technology infrastructure is a key national objective.

The IDA, meanwhile, is already working hard to win new data centre investments for Ireland. Last year the Agency appointed Jacobs Engineering, supported by AOS Planning, to identify potential strategic land banks in Ireland that would be particularly suitable for the development of data centres. Evaluation of sites that are compatible with the complex requirements of data centre investments is well advanced. As this study is for internal IDA Ireland purposes it is not intended for publication.

It is the case as well, despite the disappointing decision made by Apple, that Ireland is still a highly attractive destination for data centre projects. There are nearly 30 major data centres located in Ireland that are operated by some of the world's leading technology companies and I am confident that this number will increase in the future. Ireland's strengths for this type of investment, including our climate, energy supply and business environment, remain well-known to other potential investors.

Research and Development Funding

159. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the original duration envisaged for the cycle of the PRTL Cycle 5 when announced in 2010. [21975/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): The current Cycle of PRTL (Cycle 5) was announced in 2010 and has involved exchequer expenditure of approximately €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 PRTL is €14.3m with a portion of this being used to part pay outstanding bills for PRTL Cycle 5 projects.

The original duration envisaged for Cycle 5 when announced in 2010 was a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 7 years. This is set out in the grant approval letters issued by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of my Department on 21 December 2010. An extract from these letters is copied below.

“Capital funding, from the Exchequer, will be forthcoming over the lifetime of PRTL Cycle 5 (minimum timeframe 5 years, maximum 7 years) in line with the availability of funding as determined through the multi-annual Estimates and Budget process. Furthermore, the availability of Exchequer funding year on year will be subject to the provisions of the Department of Finance Capital Letter of Sanction 2011-2014 to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and

Innovation.”

Medical Card Eligibility

160. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to raise the threshold for medical cards for persons over 70 years of age in the forthcoming budget in the context of restoring cuts implemented during the economic downturn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21734/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Policy measures to be incorporated into the forthcoming Budget will be considered by Government as part of the 2019 Estimates process and, in that context, it is too early to comment on any proposed measure at this time.

State Claims Agency Data

161. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who had an adverse reaction to the swine flu vaccine who have cases before the courts involving the State Claims Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21852/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I cannot comment on individual cases or matters that are the subject of litigation but I can provide background information on this litigation and clarify matters that are already in the public domain.

As of 9 May 2018, legal proceedings against the Minister, the Health Services Executive and GlaxoSmithKline Biological SA have been initiated by seventy individuals. The plaintiffs allege personal injury in which they claim the development of narcolepsy resulted from the administration of the H1N1 pandemic vaccine. The management of the cases transferred to the State Claims Agency on 15 October 2013 when the Taoiseach signed the National Treasury Management Agency (Delegation of Claims Management Functions) (Amendment) Order 2013.

I have been informed by the Agency that cases before the courts in relation to the management of the discovery is the lead case. It would not be appropriate for a Minister to interfere in the courts case management of these claims which are delegated to the SCA for management.

To date the Health Products Regulatory Authority has received 1,828 reports of suspected adverse reactions in association with Swine Flu vaccines (vaccines include Pandemrix, Celvapan and a small number of reports where the brand was unknown to the reporter).

I am continuing to engage with the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Finance on what further improvements can be made to the legal framework governing the management of medical negligence cases.

HSE Properties

162. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the future of the vacant health centre in Rathangan, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21736/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the

Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Smoking Ban

163. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the smoking ban; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21738/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The current legislative framework on tobacco control is the Public Health (Tobacco) Acts 2002 to 2015. Section 47 of the Public Health (Tobacco) Acts prohibits smoking in most enclosed work places. This includes office blocks, public houses/bars, restaurants and company vehicles (cars and vans). The overall purpose of the ban is to limit people from the harms of second hand tobacco smoke. Section 47(7) provides exemptions from the general prohibition in respect of certain places / premises including prisons, nursing homes, non-acute long stay facilities and psychiatric hospitals.

The Protection of Children's Health (Tobacco Smoke in Mechanically Propelled Vehicles) Act 2014 prohibits the smoking of tobacco in cars where children are present.

The policy document Tobacco Free Ireland (2013) sets a target for Ireland to be tobacco free (i.e. with a prevalence rate of less than 5%) by 2025. Tobacco Free Ireland addresses a range of tobacco control issues and initiatives and contains over 60 recommendations. Some of those recommendations relate to extending the smoking ban on a legislative basis to the campuses of primary and secondary schools and child care facilities. Other recommendations relate to the promotion, on a voluntary basis and in conjunction with key stakeholders, of smoke free environments on the outdoor campuses of third level institutions, health care facilities, Government facilities, sports facilities, playgrounds, parks and beaches. Progress has been made in particular in relation to health care and Government facilities, playgrounds and third level institutions.

The Government recently agreed to a Seanad Private Members' Motion seeking the Minister for Health to extend the smoking ban to outdoor commercial public places where food is consumed. It was agreed that the measure would be addressed on the completion of the current tobacco control legislative programme as set out in Tobacco Free Ireland and in accordance with Ireland's international legislative obligations. Minister Catherine Byrne set out the detail of the legislative programme in the debate in Seanad Éireann of 25 April 2018 on that Motion.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

164. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the time persons over 75 years of age are forced to wait in emergency departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21739/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for unscheduled care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments. Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

Notwithstanding the increased level of resources provided, this winter has been particularly

difficult for our health services with ED attendances up 3.7% and admissions up 3.3% during the first quarter of the year, as compared to the same period in 2017.

The situation was further exacerbated by Storm Emma and the severe weather that followed. In response to this, I approved a further €5m in emergency funding to provide additional home support packages and transitional care beds to assist the safe discharge of patients who required support to return home following the adverse weather.

In the light of the conclusions of the Health Service Capacity Review that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

As outlined in the Capacity Review, the demographic pressures being experienced by the health service are such as to demand not just additional capacity, but continued emphasis on health and wellbeing initiatives, an improved model of care with a stronger role for enhanced community based services and continued improvement in productivity including in acute hospitals. The Government has approved a record level of capital investment in health at €10.9 billion over the next 10 years. This will provide for a major enhancement of the capacity of our health services to meet demand. Importantly, the accelerated introduction of additional capacity for 2018/2019 will be matched by forthcoming reforms including the publication of a detailed Sláintecare Implementation Plan and the overhaul of the current GP contract.

Finally, a review of the Winter Initiative 2017/2018 is being undertaken, which will inform a 3 year plan for unscheduled care, as well as supporting the provision of additional capacity in Winter 2018/19.

With specific regard to the Deputy's question on persons over 75 years of age, there are three main programmes focused on prioritising and improving the experience of patients over 75 in the emergency healthcare system.

The Integrated Care Programme for Older People (ICPOP) and the National Clinical Programme for Older People (NCPOP) are developing integrated primary and secondary care services for older people. This involves establishing integrated multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) in both acute hospitals and CHOs to address the specific needs of older people (especially those who are frail or at risk of frailty); case management within MDTs linked to other services that coordinates and plans care needs across a continuum; and bespoke care pathways with appropriate expertise in older persons' care.

The Frailty at the Front Door (FFD) programme, which is the assertive case management of frail older patients deployed in acute hospitals (i.e. ED and MAUs) consists of timely identification and screening of older attendees to acute hospitals; comprehensive and early multidisciplinary team assessment; and assertive discharge with a coordinated response to the needs of frail older patients.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

165. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that received treatment under the National Treatment Purchase Fund in 2017, and to date in 2018, by category of treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21740/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information sought by the Deputy has

been requested from the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF).

A response will issue directly to the Deputy as soon as the information is available.

Hospital Appointments Status

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21744/18]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

167. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, programme in place for ophthalmology service at Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21763/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the NTPF to provide treatment for patients.

The recently launched Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan outlines the combined impact of HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) activity in 2018. The Action Plan places a particular focus on cataract surgery and includes a commitment that the NTPF will provide 5,000 cataract procedures to patients. In addition, the NTPF commits to offer treatment to all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 9 months for a cataract procedure.

Cork University Hospital (CUH) advise that patients requiring Inpatient/Daycase ophthalmology treatment are referred to South Infirmity Hospital Cork and held on their waiting list. The active Inpatient / Daycase waiting list for South Infirmity Hospital Cork shows that at the end of April 2018 there were 929 patients on the ophthalmology waiting list and of these, 86% of patients are waiting 8 months or less.

The NTPF will deliver 20,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments across a range of specialties through both outsourcing and HSE insourcing. I would encourage individual hospitals to engage with the NTPF to identify potential outsourcing and insourcing initiatives to be put in place over the course of the year.

National Cervical Screening Programme Data

168. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the locations in which all smear test analysis and readings took place by county in the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21765/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the HSE that there is a geographic aspect to the allocation of smear tests for analysis but that it will take some days to collate the required information as far as it is possible on a county basis.

I will ensure that the data is forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

National Cervical Screening Programme Data

169. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the locations to which cervical screen smears are now being sent for examination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21766/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Currently cervical smear testing is carried out by three laboratories:

- Quest Diagnostics Inc, Teterboro, New Jersey USA;
- MedLab Pathology Ltd, Dublin; and
- Coombe Women and Infant's University Hospital, Dublin.

Approximately 50% of the testing is done in Ireland. All three laboratories meet quality assurance standards and are certified by the relevant national authorities.

National Cervical Screening Programme Administration

170. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health if organisations (details supplied) send their smears to the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital for analysis; if other public or private smears carried out outside of CervicalCheck are examined at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21767/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the HSE that smear tests from the IFPA and Dublin Well Woman Centre clinics are assigned to the Coombe Woman and Infants University Hospital for analysis. The analysis of CervicalCheck smears from a number of GP practices, as well as the testing of samples arising from 3 colposcopy clinics, is also undertaken at this hospital.

The HSE advise that they have no knowledge of other smear tests that are processed by the Coombe Woman and Infants University Hospital.

Hospital Appointments Status

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health to set out the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21773/18]

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.

Disease Management

172. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health to outline the steps he is taking to meet Ireland's pledge to eliminate hepatitis C as part of the World Health Organization programme; the progress that has been made to date; the reason a new national strategy has not been developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21788/18]

173. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if funding can be made available as part of the hepatitis C elimination programme to allow for schemes to reach high-risk populations to be put on a secure financial footing beyond pilot studies to continue their work; his plans for a scoping exercise to ascertain the service needs within existing programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21789/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 173 together.

Ireland is committed to the WHO target of eliminating hepatitis C, including making it a rare disease by 2030.

In 2015, the National Hepatitis C Treatment Programme (NHCTP) was established as a multi-annual public health plan. It aims to provide treatment over the coming years, across a range of healthcare settings, to all persons living with hepatitis C in Ireland.

The Programme Advisory Group provides oversight, advice, assurances and strategic direction to the Programme. The group involves key stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of the multi-annual public health plan for the treatment of hepatitis C in Ireland over the coming years. In order to achieve this, the Programme has been allocated funding of €30m each year since 2015.

The Programme is also supported by a Clinical Advisory Group (CAG), which provides oversight and direction for decisions on clinical prioritisation and selection of appropriate drug treatment regimens. The CAG includes healthcare professionals across a number of disciplines involved in the delivery of care to patients with hepatitis C.

The NHCTP has provided treatment to more than 2000 patients in the hospital setting since 2015. Access to treatment is currently open to all patients clinically prioritised, with no restrictions on availability. The programme aims to treat 1500-1800 patients in 2018.

In 2016, the NHCTP established a steering group which developed an integrated model of care for treatment across hospital and community services. In June 2017, for the initial phase of integrating hepatitis C treatment into community settings, the HSE began pilot treatment sites in 2 drug treatment centres in Dublin. These pilot sites support provision of treatment for patients who find it difficult to engage with the hospital based service.

The NHCTP is continuing to monitor and evaluate these pilot programmes, to assess the suitability, feasibility, and sustainability of providing hepatitis C treatment in these settings on a larger scale. It is understood that the HSE is developing plans for more sites in 2018, including prison and homeless services, in addition to developing existing shared care models currently being rolled out at St Vincent's University Hospital.

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre, in collaboration with the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) of the Department of Health, published national clinical guidelines for hepatitis C screening in July 2017.

The aim of the guidelines are to reduce the overall health and economic impact of hepatitis C infection and to contribute to the elimination of the virus as a public health concern in Ireland by 2030, by enhancing and further improving the screening of those at risk.

The HSE National Service Plan for 2018 is committed to the continued development of integrated care models for hepatitis C treatment, in community and acute settings, and to the national clinical guidelines on hepatitis C screening.

Home Help Service Eligibility

174. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health to outline the status of home-help hours for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21791/18]

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 Appointments Status

175. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health to outline the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21792/18]

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 Staff Recruitment

176. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to appoint a lymphedema nurse to Letterkenny General Hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21793/18]

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

National Cervical Screening Programme Data

177. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health to set out in tabular form the detection rates of pre-cancerous abnormal cells discovered by each of the four laboratories contracted to conduct the cervical screening tests (details supplied) since 2008 for each of the laboratories concerned. [21805/18]

178. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health to provide details on the reports and studies relied on by his Department in 2008 and subsequently to support the decision to outsource the cervical screening programme. [21806/18]

179. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health to outline the submissions made by laboratories tendering for contracts for the cervical screening programme in 2008 and on subsequent occasions. [21807/18]

180. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the 2014 and subsequent audits commissioned by CervicalCheck were part of the laboratory quality assurance process; and the details of such audits. [21808/18]

181. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the screening test conducted in US laboratories is conducted in the same manner as those done in laboratories here; and if all smears are separately screened by two independent medical scientists who are trained as cytologists. [21809/18]

182. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the staff conducting smear testing in laboratories outside of the State are qualified to the same standard as those conducting the tests here, that is, if they are medical scientists and pathologists with specific qualifications and training similar to that required to operate here. [21810/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 to 182, inclusive, together.

All laboratories contracted by CervicalCheck meet the programme's standards and have ISO accreditation, certified by the relevant national authorities. The laboratories undergo annual certification or surveillance audits from the relevant national certification body for their continuing accreditation.

CervicalCheck monitors and reviews a number of criteria in relation to laboratory performance including volumes, sources of tests, turnaround times, recommendations assigned to results, screener sensitivity and workload metrics, external quality assurance and positive pre-

dictive values.

Other aspects of the issues raised relate to matters that are now the subject of a Scoping Inquiry that I established on 8th May 2018. The Terms of Reference of the Scoping Inquiry, which is being led by Dr Gabriel Scally, are very comprehensive and include the following:

- examine all aspects of CervicalCheck.
- examine the tendering, contracting, operation, conflict of interest arrangements, performance information and performance management, accreditation and quality assurance of contracted cytology laboratory services by CervicalCheck from initiation of the programme.

Services for People with Disabilities

183. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a programme (details supplied); if it will recommence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21820/18]

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.

Vaccination Programme

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) raised in a media broadcast; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21821/18]

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21851/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 and 190 together.

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women worldwide. Mortality from cervical cancer in Ireland is above the European average. In 2018 more than 90 Irish women will die from cervical cancer. According to the World Health Organisation, which has reviewed international evidence, there is a strong association between HPV infection and the development of cervical cancer and that HPV vaccination is effective in preventing the development of cervical cancer. There are over 100 types of HPV and around 40 types of HPV can infect the genital tract. Some of these are low-risk types which cause genital warts, while others are high-risk types that are associated with the development of various cancers such as cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, penis and throat. Ninety nine percent (99%) of cervical cancer is caused by persistent infection of certain high risk types of HPV.

The introduction of HPV immunisation has had a significant impact in many parts of the

world. Countries with high vaccine uptake rates have seen the highest impact:

- In Scotland where 90% of girls have been vaccinated since 2008 there has been a 90% fall in HPV infections in vaccinated girls;
- Precancerous growths of the cervix have been reduced by more than 50% in countries such as Australia, Sweden and Scotland;
- Finland recently published the evidence that HPV immunisation protects against invasive HPV-associated cancer.

There are 2 licensed HPV vaccines available in Ireland. Gardasil is the vaccine used by the HSE in the School Immunisation Programme. It protects against HPV types 16 and 18 which cause seven in ten cases of cervical cancer, and types 6 and 11 which cause the majority of genital warts. Gardasil has been authorised for use across the European Union since 2006 and has been used in over 25 European countries, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. To date over 227 million doses have been distributed worldwide. In Ireland over 730,000 doses of the vaccine have been distributed and more than 238,000 girls have received the full vaccine course.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines including vaccines that are licensed in Ireland. The HPRA and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. HPV is one of the most closely studied and monitored medicinal products.

All medicines, including vaccines are subject to on-going review and evaluation of all available data from a range of sources, including systematic scientific literature review, to consider any impact that their data may have on the overall assessment of the benefits and risks of a medicinal product. Taking into account the totality of the available information, the benefits of the HPV vaccines continue to outweigh their risks. The safety of these vaccines continues to be monitored at EU level through the EMA and its expert committees, which includes representatives from member state competent authorities such as the HPRA.

In recent years the spread of inaccurate information on social media concerning the safety and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine has had an impact on uptake rates.

One of the most important things we can do is to provide accurate and credible information to enable parents to make a fully informed decision concerning HPV vaccination. The HSE National Immunisation Office developed a HPV website (hvp.ie) which has been endorsed by the WHO. The focus must remain on increasing uptake rates as the best way of reducing cervical cancer, and I would encourage the parents of all eligible girls to ensure that their daughters receive this important life-saving vaccine.

You will recall that there was an extensive debate on the safety of the HPV vaccine and its efficacy in preventing the development of cervical cancer in this House on 28 March last in which a motion was passed unanimously which recognised that the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine protects young girls from developing a cervical cancer when they grow up, supported the campaign to encourage parents to avail of the HPV vaccine for their children in their first year of secondary school, and which called for the programme to be extended to include boys.

The Health Information and Quality Authority is undertaking a health technology assessment (HTA), at the request of the Department of Health, on extending the national immunisation schedule to include HPV vaccination of boys. This HTA will establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness of providing the vaccine to boys and I await the completion of the HTA later

this year.

Services for People with Disabilities

185. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when funding in respect of a business case for a person (details supplied) will be sanctioned for respite services in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21823/18]

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

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

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

Child and Adult Mental Health Services

186. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment through CAMHS for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21825/18]

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.

Audiology Services Provision

187. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the status of audits or examination of audiology services in counties Mayo and Roscommon; if the findings of such reports will be published; his views on the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21838/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An audiology clinical lead structure, including formal clinical governance and quality assurance mechanisms, was put in place in the HSE in 2013/2014 on foot of recommendations of the National Audiology Review Group Report 2011.

As part of regular audits of standards under this new structure the HSE noted potential concerns in 2015 in relation to the provision of aspects of community audiology in the Mayo and Roscommon area. The concerns related to hearing assessments on children provided by an external provider.

A full look back review of records of children who received hearing assessments and management in the area from April 2011 to February 2015 was completed. Follow-up consultations

were offered to children where this was deemed appropriate.

The Report of the look back is now in its final draft stage and is expected to be released to families next week.

I understand from the HSE that families were kept informed appropriately throughout the process. There will be further communication with the families on release of the report next week.

Maternity Services Provision

188. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce or alter maternity services in the Inishowen peninsula, County Donegal; and the short and long-term plans in this regard. [21848/18]

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

General Practitioner Contracts

189. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the commencement of negotiations for a new contract for general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21849/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge the important role that general practitioners play in our health service and I recognise the commitment of GPs to ensuring a responsive, accessible and high-quality service to patients. The Government is committed to engaging with the representatives of GPs on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the current GMS contract and which will enable additional resources to be put into general practice.

Since the beginning of this month officials from my Department and the HSE have met with the Irish Medical Organisation in order to progress this agenda. In line with the long-established approach to such processes, and by agreement of the parties concerned, I am not in position to give further details while discussions between the parties are under way.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 184.

Hospital Appointments Administration

191. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if a procedure for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21861/18]

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 Services

192. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) was not contacted by a hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21863/18]

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.

Ambulance Service Provision

193. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if an incident (details supplied) in which no ambulance services were available at the time in County Kildare will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21866/18]

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

Psychological Services

194. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding provision of psychologists at a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21870/18]

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

195. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce charges on patients that pay for venesection clinic appointments in County Louth; the plans in place to monitor if venesection clinic appointments are reducing since the introduction; if so, if a clinical study will be carried out to assess the health implications that may follow for haemochromatosis patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21871/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department and the HSE are currently considering the issue of the application of the public in-patient charge of €80 for venesection in Acute Hospitals as well as broader issues in relation to the treatment of patients with Hereditary Haemochromatosis.

In this context, a meeting between Department of Health and HSE officials is being ar-

ranged.

Legislative Programme

196. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding drafting of legislation concerning the deprivation of liberty in nursing homes and other residential facilities [21872/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department of Health is continuing to prioritise the development of Heads of Bill to provide legislative clarity on the issue of deprivation of liberty in order to meet our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These provisions will apply to residential centres for persons with disabilities and nursing homes. The provisions will also apply to mental health facilities in situations where a person has mental health issues but is not suffering from a mental disorder and therefore cannot be involuntarily detained under the Mental Health Act 2001.

The deprivation of liberty proposals will apply in circumstances in which it is proposed that a relevant person is to live in, or is already living in, such facilities and

- (a) is, or will be, under continuous supervision and control; and
- (b) is not, or will not, be free to leave; and
- (c) there is reason to believe that the person lacks capacity to make a decision to live in the relevant facility.

The approach taken in the Heads makes use of the decision-making procedures, supports and safeguards that already exist under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and the Heads also include some additional safeguards specific to deprivation of liberty. The proposals build on the machinery of the Decision Support Service, which is provided for under this Act. For that reason, it is not possible for the deprivation of liberty proposals to come into operation in advance of the commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and the operationalisation of the Decision Support Service.

The deprivation of liberty provisions will be brought forward as a stand-alone Bill and will add a new Part to the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. My Department has worked closely with the Department of Justice and Equality in developing the proposals to ensure that the Heads align with this Act as well as meet our obligations under the UN Convention.

A public consultation on the draft legislative provisions formally closed on 9 March 2018 but submissions were accepted until 3 May. The Department is currently analysing the 50 submissions received with a view to amending its draft Heads of Bill as necessary. We intend to undertake this work as quickly as possible, while also ensuring that the system we are developing will work in practice and will provide sufficient safeguards in accordance with the requirements of international law, domestic law and relevant jurisprudence.

To assist with this process, an advisory group has been convened to consider the findings of the public consultation process, to advise on any appropriate amendments to the draft Heads of Bill and to ensure that the approach taken integrates effectively with existing legislation.

Hospital Appointments Status

197. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21874/18]

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.

National Cervical Screening Programme

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that will be eligible for the redress scheme being set up in respect of the cervical cancer screening scandal; the approach with regard to indemnification from the US laboratories in this regard; the definition of a normal error in terms of a false negative smear test results and therefore possibly outside of redress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21888/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On the 8 May I established a Scoping Inquiry which is being led by Dr Gabriel Scally, Professor of Public Health at the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol. The Inquiry is expected to report by the end of June, and subject to its findings, the Government is committed to establishing a full Commission of Investigation.

The outcomes of the Scoping Inquiry and subsequent Commission of Investigation will inform any next steps needed to address issues related to CervicalCheck.

National Cervical Screening Programme Administration

199. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the additional supports available to women that previously had cervical cancer following a false negative smear test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21889/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 11 May, I announced a comprehensive package of health and social care measures to support women and families affected by issues relating to CervicalCheck audit. These measures include:

- The provision of a discretionary medical card for each woman affected, or their next-of-kin in cases where the woman has sadly died;
- The meeting of out-of-pocket medical costs incurred;

- The provision of primary care supports, including counselling, to the women affected;
- The provision of counselling services, including bereavement counselling where appropriate, to the immediate family members of these women; and
- The provision of other health and social care supports, including travel costs and childminding, where appropriate.

Disability Services Provision

200. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a matter raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) will be reviewed and responded to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21912/18]

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.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

201. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is being paid his salary to the end of July 2018 in view of the fact that he resigned early; if this was part of his contract; if negotiations took place with the person on the matter; if so, the persons that participated in the negotiations on the State's behalf; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21913/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The terms applied to the former Director General are those specified in his contract. The contract provided for the offer of an alternative position in the public service on completion of the contract or, payment equivalent to 6 months salary on conclusion of the contract. The contract also provides for payment in lieu of notice to the end of the contract term.

Medical Conditions

202. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if queries raised by persons (details supplied) in correspondence will receive a response. [21914/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A reply to the concerns raised in Mrs Byrne's correspondence has been issued from my office. This acknowledged the work done by the association on the recognition and management of ME and my Department has been in contact with the HSE on these issues.

Housing Adaptation Grant

203. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if a case regarding persons (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21919/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I wish to inform the Deputy that Housing Adaptation Grants are a matter for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Payments

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the correct level of support payable through the nursing home support scheme in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21933/18]

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.

National Cervical Screening Programme

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has been contacted in regard to CervicalCheck; when she will receive a follow-up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21946/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE have advised that any woman who has received a clear CervicalCheck smear test result previously should proceed with their next scheduled test as normal.

With a view to reassuring women about the safety of the CervicalCheck programme, I have arranged that any woman who has had a CervicalCheck smear test, and who following consultation with her GP determines that she wishes to have a further test, may do so without charge.

Fodder Crisis

206. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if additional resources have been provided to assist farmers whose herds are restricted and are suffering from the fodder crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21741/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department operates a Hardship Grant scheme as part of the TB Eradication Programme. The scheme operates from 1 November to 30 April 2018 and is aimed at assisting eligible herdowners who retain and feed animals during prolonged periods of restriction as a result of a TB breakdown.

In response to pressures on fodder supplies, felt initially in the West and North West caused by a long wet winter and spring, a national Fodder Transport Support measure was deemed the appropriate response and was introduced in January 2018. The situation changed quickly following storm Emma in March and fodder shortages spread to the South and remaining parts of the country. At this point, following consultation with Teagasc and industry representatives, importation of fodder was considered necessary to address domestic shortages. As a result, a

Fodder Import Support measure was introduced in the first week of April to complement the more locally based Fodder Transport 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 it was decided to extend both measures by one week until 7th May.

European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

207. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the financial supports available for struggling fishermen in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21785/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I understand that the Deputy is referring to difficulties experienced by fishermen in Kerry in putting to sea because of unsettled weather conditions.

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. I have made very considerable funds available to the seafood sector in 2018 through a range of EMFF schemes. In doing so, I secured a very significant commitment from the Exchequer to the EMFF Programme. However, this means that there are no other sources of funds available to me, other than the EMFF, to assist the sector with any support requirements.

The EMFF Regulation (508/2014) provides for a special compensation scheme for fishermen experiencing significant economic losses arising from severe storms etc. Article 35 foresees the establishment by fishermen of a 'Mutual Fund for Adverse Climatic Events and Environmental Incidents'. This Fund would act as a form of mutual insurance for otherwise uninsurable losses, by paying compensation to affiliated fishermen for losses that exceed 30% of the fisherman's annual turnover arising from severe storms and other adverse climatic events, for losses arising from environmental incidents and for the costs of rescue at sea for fishermen or fishing vessels. The Fund must be established and managed by fishermen and be funded through the subscriptions of affiliated fishermen. The compensation would only be available to fishermen affiliated to the Fund. Support to the Fund from the EMFF Programme would be in the form of a contribution to the costs of compensation paid out by the Fund. Depending on the type of vessels or fishermen experiencing losses, EMFF assistance may be as high as 80%. To date, no fishing representatives have proposed to me that they wish to take on responsibility for the establishment of a Mutual Fund. I cannot lawfully establish the Fund on behalf of the sector. When appropriate representatives of the sector are in a position to establish the Fund, my Department and BIM stand ready to assist and advise fishermen and their representatives in any way possible. However, the EMFF does not permit a financial contribution towards the costs of establishment or management of the Fund. In order for such a Fund to be viable, it is likely to be necessary for the fishing sector to strongly support the initiative through widespread affiliation.

GLAS Payments

208. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a farmer (details supplied) in County Galway under the 2017 GLAS scheme; the reason for the delay in issuing the payment; if his attention has been drawn to the financial burden on farmers awaiting GLAS payments due to the fodder crises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21811/18]

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 take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. In addition, in the cases selected for inspection, the inspection and any issues arising must be finalised. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis as cases become eligible for payment.

Forestry Management

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 375 of 2 November 2016, the status of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21822/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in this case was reminded of the required setback distances that must be observed for dwelling houses and was again advised that all trees within this specified setback zone should be removed without delay. A Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine official subsequently visited the site again to ascertain if this has been carried out and consideration is ongoing arising from that visit.

GLAS Payments

210. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a farmer (details supplied) in County Galway under the 2017 GLAS scheme; the reason for the delay in issuing the payment in view of the fact that there is no issue with the GLAS plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21828/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above-named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received all payments in respect of 2016.

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 and will be in direct contact with the participant concerned to resolve the issue arising. GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis as cases are cleared for payment.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

211. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken regarding a complaint made by National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, inspectors in relation to a farmyard (details supplied) in County Wexford on 4 May 2018 involving the existence of a number of decomposing carcasses in the farmyard; if an inspection has

been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21841/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The case referred to is being investigated by my Department and I do not propose commenting further in the circumstances.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21850/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As detailed in my reply to a PQ on this matter on 26 April 2018 (ref. 18411/18), the application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection, which included a field visit to determine the position on the ground, identified over-declarations in area exceeding 10% of the area claimed. This resulted in the area determined being reduced by 1.5 times the difference between the area claimed and area determined, as required under the governing EU regulations. The final position was that no payment was due under the 2017 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes. A letter detailing the final outcome of the inspection issued on 6 February 2018.

A review of the case was requested and this was referred to the local inspectorate for examination. This process, which included a further field visit, has now been completed and the outcome will be notified to the person named in the coming days.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with this outcome, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

GLAS Data

213. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1, 2 and 3 that have received their 2017 balancing payment by county in tabular form; the number that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting on their 2017 balancing payment; the number in receipt of GLAS payments that have yet to receive the 2017 balancing payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21907/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Balancing Payments for the GLAS scheme can only commence when the Member State has verified that all eligibility conditions have been met. This is a requirement in the relevant EU Payment Regulations and is a long-standing EU audit requirement. The Department is currently undertaking the verification process. It is anticipated that GLAS balancing payments will commence in the coming days.

I would encourage any GLAS applicant with outstanding obligations, such as the submission of a Nutrient Management Plan or a Commonage Management Plan to speak to their advisor and ensure that this work is completed as a priority. Without the submission of all the required information, these applicants will be ineligible for further GLAS payments.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Data

214. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of the sheep welfare scheme payment that have received their 2017 balancing payment by county, in tabular form; the number that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting on their 2017 balancing payment; the number in receipt of sheep welfare payments that have yet to receive the 2017 balancing payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21908/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

215. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of the AOES payment that have received their 2017 balancing payment by county, in tabular form; the number that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2017 balancing payment; the number in receipt of AOES payments that have yet to receive the 2017 balancing payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21909/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All AEOS cases that have passed payment approval checks have been paid in full for 2017. The following table gives the numbers per county paid and the numbers per county not paid. Any participants who have been contacted in relation to outstanding documentation are encouraged to reply without delay:

County	Numbers Paid	Not paid
Carlow	8	0
Cavan	72	2
Clare	119	6
Cork	82	8
Donegal	297	12
Dublin	3	0
Galway	349	11
Kerry	161	11
Kildare	5	1
Kilkenny	18	0
Laois	17	1
Leitrim	152	7
Limerick	52	2
Longford	18	0
Louth	12	1
Mayo	335	22
Meath	22	1
Monaghan	45	0
Offaly	21	4

County	Numbers Paid	Not paid
Roscommon	127	8
Sligo	85	6
Tipperary	33	1
Waterford	16	0
Westmeath	29	0
Wexford	11	0
Wicklow	12	2
Totals	2,101	106

Basic Payment Scheme Data

216. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 381 of 8 May 2018, his views on whether all entitlements will reach a minimum value of 60% of the basic payment scheme national average by 2019. [21910/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All payment entitlements with an initial unit value less than 90% of the BPS national average are scheduled to reach a minimum value of 60% of the BPS national average by 2019 (Article 25(4) of EU Regulation 1307/2013 applies).

EU Funding

217. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount allocated separately to the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development at EU level for the MFF programme 2021-2027 as referenced in COM(2018) 321 final. [21911/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The total CAP budget (EAGF and EAFRD) will be approximately €365 billion over the 7 year period (2021-2027). Pillar 1 (EAGF) will account for approximately €286 billion with Pillar 2 (EAFRD) accounting for approximately €79 billion.

The following table gives a breakdown per year allocated under the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (figures are € billions):

Scheme	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
EAGF	40.300	40.527	40.791	40.931	41.072	41.214	41.357	€286.195
EAFRD	11.259	11.259	11.259	11.259	11.259	11.259	11.259	€78.811
Total EAGF and EAFRD	51.559	51.786	52.050	52.190	52.331	52.473	52.616	€365.005

Broadband Service Provision

218. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the commitment to provide high speed broadband to each house and business in County Louth; the deadline for same; the number of homes and businesses

which have access to high speed broadband; the number of additional homes and businesses which received access to high speed broadband in 2017; the number which will receive access in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21760/18]

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. 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.

According to OSI figures provided to my Department in Q1 2018 there are nearly 60,500 premises in County Louth. Over 8,500 (14%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served by the State led Intervention. Nearly 51,000 (84%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are, or will be, served by commercial providers, some 1,000 (2%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

Information on categories of premises can be accessed on my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie by entering the relevant 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://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie

According to figures provided by eir the company had passed some 6,700 premises in County Louth as of Q4 2017. An additional 881 premises have been passed in Q1 2018 according to figures currently being verified by my Department. The remaining Light Blue premises (some 1,000) will be covered by eir during the remainder of their roll out.

A county by county breakdown of eir's data for Q1 2018 will be available shortly on my Department's website.

Prior to the rollout of the State led 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 continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers, including the Officer for County Louth, on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/latest-news/Pages/Broadband-Officers-Workshop.aspx>.

Broadband Service Provision

219. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the fibre optic broadband system at a location (details supplied) can be extended due to poor broadband connectivity in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21761/18]

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. 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.

According to my Departments High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, the telecommunications infrastructure serving the area referred to by the Deputy is in a BLUE area, while the Ballinagard area itself is a mixture of both BLUE and AMBER.

Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll-out, siting and extension of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised

market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

There are 191 premises in the townland of Ballinagard. 60 (31%) fall within the AMBER area and these will be served under the State led Intervention. 131 (69%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers. Information on categories of premises is available on my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie by entering the relevant 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.

Where a premises situated in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would 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 follow up.

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

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

Broadband Service Provision

220. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for fibre broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21775/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post GeoDirectory, issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, in accordance with their licence agreement. Each new address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website and a notification letter is issued to the occupant containing the Eircode of that address.

The timeframe for the updated eircodes to be made accessible to telecommunications companies is dependent on each company's own eircode data provider's contracted agreement. All such eircode data providers are sourced and contracted by individual telecommunications companies, including eir.

Operational matters and commercial decisions of private commercial operators, including the updating of databases, are a matter for these commercial operators and one in which I have no direct function.

Brexit Issues

221. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has received correspondence or had discussions with his UK counterpart with regard to the UK's decision to exit Euratom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21905/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The ongoing Brexit negotiations, including matters relating to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the Euratom Treaty, are being conducted bilaterally between the European Union, represented by the European Commission, and the United Kingdom. Ireland contributes to the process through its representation at the European Council Article 50 Working Party which meets regularly to discuss Brexit related issues, including Euratom.

I have exchanged written correspondence with Minister Richard Harrington, Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy, on the importance of maintaining our bilateral contacts on radiological issues post-Brexit and have received reassurance that the United Kingdom is taking all necessary steps to ensure that it will continue to operate as a responsible nuclear State, and will maintain the appropriate safeguards under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Officials from my Department will continue to engage on this, and other related matters, with their United Kingdom counterparts through the United Kingdom-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters. The Group met most recently on 18 April last, and that meeting included a briefing from the United Kingdom on measures being developed to ensure that the United Kingdom meets its obligations under international conventions on nuclear safety post-Brexit.

Roads Maintenance Funding

222. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific funding will be allocated to Monaghan County Council in 2018 for the essential repair of roads damaged by flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21857/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position remains as outlined previously to the Deputy. The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

I announced the 2018 regional and local road allocations on 29th January and all grant funding available to my Department has now been allocated. It is a matter for each Council to determine its priorities and decide its work programme on that basis, taking available grant funding and its own resources into account. There is no additional funding available to my Department at present.

Cycling Policy

223. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of additional children cycling to school as a result of 2017 Cycle Right training; the criteria or metric his Department uses to evaluate the success or failure of Cycle Right; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [21730/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no data available on the number of children cycling to school directly as a result of Cycle Right Training.

The overall purpose of the Cycle Right training programme is to provide practical cycle safety and skills training to support more competent and confident cycling. Cycle Right is supported by my Department, the Road Safety Authority and administered through Cycling Ireland, with input from central and local agencies, including Sport Ireland Coaching, An Taisce Green Schools, An Garda Síochána and local authorities.

In 2017, 15,245 pupils participated in Cycle Right training in 428 schools across 22 counties. This cycle training, which includes an on-road element, will result, over time, in an increase in the number of responsible cyclists on our roads. As Cycle Right is essentially a training programme, we will continue to monitor it based on the number of participants, which show that it has proven extremely popular since its inception.

My Department also funds the Green Schools Travel Flag programme which is overseen by the NTA and delivered by An Taisce. This programme monitors the numbers of children travelling to school by Active Travel means. Survey results from that programme indicate that levels of children cycling to participating schools increased from 3% to 4% over the two year period 2015-2017.

Road Projects

224. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the upgrade to the N67 involves replacing stone walls with stake and wire fencing in view of the fact this is not in keeping with the heritage and landscape of the area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21772/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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.

Motor Insurance Coverage

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some insurance companies are refusing to quote persons if they are not VAT registered; his views on whether this is impeding small businesses carrying out their work; his plans to ensure this practice is withdrawn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21794/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Insurance companies are private companies. Neither my Department nor the Central Bank of Ireland has the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing of insurance products. The EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. 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.

Insurance Ireland operates a free insurance information service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. All cases regarding refusal to quote, or quotations that are so excessive as to be in effect a refusal, should be directed to Insurance Ireland by phone at (01) 676 1820, or by email at declined@insuranceireland.eu or by post at 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1, D01 E7E8 quoting the Declined Cases Agreement. The Declined Cases Agreement is administered by a Committee made up of representatives of insurance companies, and including a representative of the Consumers' Association of Ireland and the Financial Services Ombudsman's Bureau. All motor insurance providers in Ireland must agree to abide by the Declined Cases Agreement under the General Good Requirements For Insurance and Reinsurance Undertakings of the Central Bank of Ireland (see page 6 of <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/Regulation/insurance-reinsurance/solvency-ii/requirements-and-guidance/general-good-requirements-2012.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

Tourism Funding

226. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding opportunities available for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21864/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy development. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland to invest in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's grant programmes. Similarly, the Department does not have discretionary funds at its disposal to assist with individual tourism proposals.

I have asked Fáilte Ireland to respond to the Deputy directly with further information on what supports may be available. Please contact my private office if you do not hear within ten working days.

Road Safety Authority Reports

227. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated publication date of the upcoming Road Safety Authority report on cycling deaths; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21892/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Cycling Facilities Funding

228. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital investment in cycling infrastructure in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21893/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In recent years, Ex-

chequer investment in cycling infrastructure has been made under a number of different programmes and schemes administered by my Department. Projects funded under the Smarter Travel programme involved integrated initiatives across a number of aspects of active/smarter travel and incorporated measures such as investment in cycle lanes, bike parking, footpaths, traffic calming measures, shared streets and other interventions that encourage and support modal shift to walking and cycling.

In addition since 2010 my Department has also provided funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme and the Regional Cities Programme to implement sustainable transport projects, including providing cycling infrastructure, in the Greater Dublin Area and the regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. Therefore, for the period 2011 to 2017 it is not possible at this time to isolate specific expenditure on cycling infrastructure alone.

Looking to the future, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that in Budget 2018 I managed to secure over €110m in capital funding which is specifically allocated to develop cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford over the period 2018-2021. This programme will provide “active travel” (i.e. cycling and walking) routes, which can help alleviate congestion by improving the viability of these particular forms of travel, and doing so in a way that provides useful connectivity with existing public transport infrastructure. Allocation of funding and details of individual projects are managed by the National Transport Authority in conjunction with the relevant local authorities. In addition to this, €55m will be spent in this same four year period on Greenways outside of the 5 cities, and the greenway programme will be largely aimed at providing an enhanced tourism and leisure amenity.

A further €135m capital funding has been allocated over this same period for investment in Sustainable Urban Transport projects. These will include projects that will provide either direct or indirect improvements for urban cycling. This programme builds on investment to date to deliver improvements in public and sustainable transport infrastructure in the regional cities and the GDA. It includes traffic management, bus priority and other smarter travel projects, which will allow transport infrastructure to function more effectively and will help relieve traffic congestion. Again, allocation of funding and details of individual projects are managed by the National Transport Authority in conjunction with the relevant local authorities.

Furthermore, investment of more than €750m on the BusConnects Programme in the same period, will deliver a transformative investment package that will finance new and expanded bus routes, greatly improve bus access, and includes designated segregated cycle lanes.

In addition to funding for the provision of infrastructure, my Department continues to be very active in promoting behavioural change to encourage more people to take up cycling and to cycle safely. We provide funding to the NTA on an annual basis for the delivery of behavioural change programmes such as Workplace and Campus travel programmes and the Green Schools Programmes. My Department also engaged Cycling Ireland to develop a new national cycle training standard - “Cycle Right” – which was rolled out in January 2017 to approximately 15,000 primary school students. My Department supports the great work that is being done by RSA in the promotion of safe roads for all road users, including the more vulnerable users such as cyclists and pedestrians. In addition my Department provides funding to local authorities throughout the country to assist in organising events and activities during Bike Week which further serve to promote cycling.

As part of an overall coordinated approach to the provision of an integrated sustainable transport network of cycling, walking and public transport, these various investments will sup-

port and lead to a further increase in the numbers cycling safely, thereby easing congestion, improving public health and enhancing the liveability of our towns and cities; the investment will, I believe, have a lasting transformative effect on our transport network over the coming years.

The detailed information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled by programme and local authority and will be forwarded in due course in line with Standing Orders.

Dublin Bus

229. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has discussed with Dublin Bus the review of its advertising standards to include the banning of advertisements of food with high salt and fat content; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21894/18]

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

Youth Services Funding

230. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the types of grants available for groups wishing to rent premises for youth clubs or youth cafes on a permanent basis; the criteria involved regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21758/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports volunteer-led youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. Each year, in the region of 1,700 local youth clubs are eligible to apply under the scheme. Organisations wishing to apply for funding under this scheme should contact their local Education and Training Board for more information.

Between 2011 and 2013 capital funding provided by my Department supported the development and fit out of new youth café proposals and there are now over 150 youth cafes throughout the country. My Department does not have available to it any funding to assist groups to rent premises for youth cafes in 2018. The development of further youth cafés may be considered as part of a needs-based decision making process for any capital funding that becomes available to my Department in future years.

Dog Breeding Industry

231. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to the number of breeding dogs at a puppy farm (details supplied); if the establishment has been inspected; and if it is registered and in compliance with the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010. [21771/18]

232. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to the number of breeding dogs at a puppy farm (details supplied); if the establishment has been inspected; and if it is registered and in compliance with the Dog

Breeding Establishments Act 2010. [21826/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

The day to day regulation of dog breeding establishments to ensure compliance with the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 is a matter for local authorities and I do not have a function in these operational activities.

However, on foot of the Deputy's question, enquiries have been made by my Department with the relevant local authority, which has indicated that the enterprise referenced is currently registered as a Dog Breeding Establishment for up to 100 breeding bitches.

Veterinary inspections of the premises are carried out on an on-going basis. The Local Authority has also confirmed that no dog breeding establishment is registered or renewed in its area without an inspection to determine compliance with the Dog Breeding Establishment guidelines.

The most recent inspection was carried out by the Local Authority on the 10th May 2017, and it has confirmed that further inspections will be carried out in 2018.

The Local Authority has confirmed that the premises has been registered since 2015. It received two inspections in 2015, and a further two in 2016. Two of the previous inspections were completed jointly with Department of Agriculture & Marine Veterinary Inspectors.

Marriage Registrations

233. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the process for registration of a marriage if required in less than three months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21873/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Legislation governing marriages is found in Part 6 of the Civil Registration Act 2004 (as amended). Section 46 of that Act requires that the parties to the intended marriage give to a registrar three months' notice of their intention to marry, unless an exemption has been granted by the courts under section 47.

Applications for an exemption may be made to either: (i) the Circuit Family Court in the jurisdiction in which either of the parties reside or carry on any profession, business or occupation or where the place of the intended marriage is situated; or (ii) the High Court.

An application may be made informally and may be held *in camera*. No court fee will be charged. An exemption will not be granted unless the applicants can show that it is justified by serious reasons and that it is in their interests.

Carer's Allowance Applications

234. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21745/18]

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. I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 24 April 2018.

The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Data

235. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount paid out by each community welfare office under the exceptional needs payment in 2017. [21747/18]

236. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount paid out by each community welfare office under the exceptional needs payment to cover fuel costs in 2017. [21748/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 235 and 236 together.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided over €36 million for exceptional and urgent payments in 2018.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the ENP scheme, however they are not maintained on the amount paid by each Community Welfare Office. Over 103,400 ENPs issued during 2017 at a provisional cost of €38 million.

In 2017 there were 2,140 payments made at a cost of over €586,000 under the ENP scheme for assistance towards heating related costs, which includes fuel and essential repairs to equipment. Details of these payment by county are provided in the table.

Should the Deputy be aware of a case which may require an ENP, the person should be advised to contact their local community welfare service who may be able to offer assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Heating category ENPs by County in 2017

County	No. of Payments	Expenditure
Carlow	34	€7,911
Cavan	38	€9,636
Clare	49	€13,672
Cork	392	€139,498
Donegal	68	€17,053
Dublin	52	€30,983
Galway	132	€30,328
Kerry	108	€28,265

County	No. of Payments	Expenditure
Kildare	91	€25,585
Kilkenny	72	€14,750
Laois	35	€11,863
Leitrim	48	€11,644
Limerick	145	€38,657
Longford	26	€5,270
Louth	36	€13,330
Mayo	78	€18,027
Meath	33	€5,280
Monaghan	5	€1,250
Offaly	17	€4,350
Roscommon	94	€20,193
Sligo	134	€37,330
Tipperary	221	€43,298
Waterford	26	€9,502
Westmeath	28	€5,948
Wexford	117	€25,441
Wicklow	63	€17,090
Total	2,142	€586,152

These figures are taken from the Department's ENP database and represent a snapshot of the ENPs as they are approved by an officer rather than when they are paid. The figures do not capture payments that are cancelled, payments that go out of date or overpayments recouped.

Fuel Allowance Data

237. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department is carrying out an examination of the effectiveness of the fuel allowance payment; if other examinations into the payment are taking place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21749/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week from October to April, to over 338,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department's schemes, including the Fuel Allowance scheme, are constantly reviewed to ensure that they are fulfilling their objectives. Recent changes to the scheme which helped increase its effectiveness include extending the duration of the scheme to 27 weeks and the introduction of an option for qualified households to receive their fuel allowance payment in two lump sums, thereby allowing people to buy fuel in bulk and potentially avail of special offers or discounts on the purchase of the particular fuel that meets their specific needs.

Fuel allowance is not the sole income support mechanism through which assistance is provided to people with special or additional heating needs. My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance as part of the household benefits package at an estimated cost of €237

million in 2018. Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, a special heating supplement may be paid to assist people in certain circumstances that have special heating needs. Exceptional needs payments (ENP) may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which an applicant is unable to meet out of his/her own resources.

Income support is only part of the answer in terms of addressing fuel poverty. The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling through proper building and household insulation. Initiatives such as the Warmer Homes Scheme, operated by Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland, under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment have a very valuable role to play in that regard. Furthermore, that Department also has responsibility for the Government's main approach to this issue, contained in "A Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty 2016-2019" which is available on that Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/energy/publications/Pages/Strategy-to-combat-energy-poverty.aspx.

The Government is committed to protecting vulnerable households from the impact of energy costs through a combination of supports, investment in programmes to improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock and energy efficiency awareness initiatives.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Maintenance Payments

238. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has set up a working group to examine child maintenance; if such work is ongoing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21750/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As I advised the Deputy in response to recent questions on this issue, the establishment of a service to assist lone parents to seek child maintenance payments would be a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, as the Family Law Acts, which place a legal obligation on parents to maintain their children, are under the remit of that Department.

In cases where the family unit has broken down, obligations regarding child maintenance continue to apply, and relevant maintenance payments can be arranged either directly between the parents themselves or through supports like the Family Mediation Service, the Legal Aid Board and the Courts.

To date I have had a number of meetings within my own Department in this regard. My Department is now reviewing the current maintenance and liable relative procedures only in so far as they relate to the one-parent family payment scheme administered by my department, and work has commenced on this review. This will necessitate my Department liaising with the Department of Justice and Equality as the Department responsible for the Family Law Acts. I hope to convene a meeting in the weeks ahead, following the completion of this work.

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

239. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will meet with representatives of an organisation (details supplied) regarding the closure of the defined benefit scheme at a company; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21751/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Scheme trustees have duties and responsibilities under trust law, under other relevant legislation and under the Pensions Act, 1990, as amended. The duties of pension scheme trustees include administering the trust in accordance with the law and the terms of the trust deed and rules. Consequently any decisions made by corporate or individual trustees of an occupational pension scheme are governed by the relevant legislation. The provisions of the Pensions Act are enforced through the supervision of the Pensions Authority.

Although the Pensions Authority is under the aegis of my Department, it regulates pension schemes entirely independently of my Department. Therefore, I am not in a position to directly intervene in individual pension schemes and it would not be appropriate for me to meet with unions regarding such schemes.

If scheme members or Deputies have concerns about any such pension scheme they should address queries directly to the Pensions Authority.

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.

Public Services Card

240. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when she will receive the Data Protection Commissioner's report into the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21752/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) formally advised my Department, on 21st February 2018, that their first preliminary report on the PSC would be sent the Department in mid-March for comment.

The second preliminary report on MyGovID, Single Customer View and the Public Service Identity was to be sent by April for comment.

No further communication has been received from the ODPC since this notification was received.

I hope that this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

241. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent by her Department on all means of advertising, including the social welfare fraud campaign and campaigns run by her Department in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21753/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department administers over 70 separate schemes and services, which affect the lives of almost every person in the State. In 2016, some 1.7 million applications for benefits, assistance and access to schemes were received and processed, and over 82 million individual payments were made to people across all age groups and to employers.

The Department is fully committed to ensuring that members of the general public are fully aware of the welfare supports and services that are available to them and notified of any scheme changes which may affect them. The Department's public information/advertising campaigns span national and regional print media and radio, digital advertising, 'out of home' which includes bus, train and Luas, and social media advertising. Advertising is targeted appropriately through the best mix of media to ensure that the Department's messages effectively reach the target customers.

All advertising expenditure undertaken by the Department is tendered for in accordance with Government and EU procurement guidelines, including use of framework agreements from the Office of Government Procurement.

Details of the campaigns undertaken in 2017 and the total costs of each campaign are set out in the table which follows.

Campaign Name	Total Campaign Costs (excl. VAT) - Including all newspaper, radio, outdoor and online advertising costs and design costs.
MyGovID (February)	€59,848
Welfare Fraud (April)	€163,923
Treatment Benefit (April)	€87,715
Back to School Clothing & Footwear (July)	€55,409
Paternity Benefit (July/August)	€106,823
Fuel Allowance Lump Sum (August)	€54,376
Jobsweek 2017 (September)	€3,147
Fuel Allowance Lump Sum (November- reminder)	€43,813
Treatment Benefit (November)	€78,887
Invalidity Pension (December)	€75,140
National Minimum Wage (December)	€46,498
Total	€775,579

Public Services Card

242. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent by her Department on advertising the public services card in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21754/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): SAFE Level 2 (SAFE 2) registration, used by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, allows a person to verify their identity once, not just for access to services provided by my Department but also for an increasing number of public services provided by other State agencies. Once a person is registered to SAFE 2, they can be issued with a Public Services Card (PSC).

There was no expenditure or public information campaign dedicated to advertising the Public Services Card in 2017.

In 2017, my Department produced an explainer video on the SAFE Level 2 Registration and the Public Services Card. This video, made available on the Department's website, has attracted over 41,000 views to date. The total cost of production of the video was €10,061.40 (incl. VAT).

Also in October 2017, the Department created a detailed seventy three page document titled "*Comprehensive Guide to SAFE Registration and the Public Services Card*", with associated design costs of €7,749 (incl. VAT). This comprehensive guide provides detailed information on all aspects of SAFE2 Registration and the PSC in a questions and answers type format. It is available on the Departments website at www.welfare.ie and provides useful information for the

general public, department customers and staff.

Jobseeker's Benefit Payments

243. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person who becomes unemployed and then receives jobseeker's benefit cannot claim for a child dependant over 18 years of age in full-time education for the first six months; the rationale for the six month timeframe; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21755/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and who are available for and genuinely seeking full-time employment. The 2018 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers' schemes of €2.17 billion. An increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) is normally payable until the child reaches 18 years of age. Where a person is in receipt of either jobseekers allowance or jobseekers benefit for at least 156 days and the child is in full-time education, an IQC will be paid up to 22 years of age or up to the end of the academic year in which he or she reaches 22. Time spent on other social welfare payments can be combined to meet the 156 days requirement, but the period between any two payments must not be more than 26 weeks.

Where a student reaches 18 during the academic year, and the customer is in receipt of a short-term payment but does not satisfy the 156 days requirement, the IQC will continue to be paid in respect of that child up to the 30th June following the birthday or until s/he completes the full-time day course, whichever is the earlier. Where a student reaches age 22 during an academic year, payment of the IQC is continued for the duration of that academic year, provided s/he remains in full-time education until then.

If a person is in receipt of a reduced rate jobseeker's benefit payment and their income is insufficient to meet their needs, they may, subject to a means test, be eligible for a top-up under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

244. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person can be granted a back to education allowance to partake in a short course which is nine months in duration rather than six months; if the rules regarding this will be relaxed in certain circumstances to assist persons in returning to education to retrain and upskill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21756/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Social Protection provides a wide range of second chance education opportunities for unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities under the back to education programme. The objective is to raise education and skills among the long term unemployed to meet the requirements of the modern labour market. The back to education programme provides a comprehensive range of options from which an unemployed person can choose the option appropriate to his/her needs. A person wishing to pursue a course of study on the BTEA must be pursuing a full-time course of study leading to a recognised qualification and progressing in their level of education. If the short course cited is a full-time course, this can be approved under BTEA a part-time course would not be approved under BTEA.

A person wishing to undertake a part-time course can apply for approval under the Education, Training and Development option (ET&D) or the Part-Time Education Option (PTEO) and may continue to receive, subject to satisfying certain conditions, his/her existing social welfare payment while attending recommended courses. The Department's Intreo staff will be happy to advise an individual of the option that might best suit their needs.

Jobseeker's Transitional Payment

245. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of lone parents that are in receipt of the jobseeker's transition payment; the number in receipt of the one parent family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21757/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): At the end of April 2018, 14,469 people were in receipt of Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JST), and 39,348 people were in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP). I note that both of these payments are only available to parents who are bringing children up without the support of a partner.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Data

246. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of partial capacity benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21764/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There were 2,361 persons in receipt of partial capacity benefit at the end of April 2018.

Carer's Allowance Applications

247. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21774/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are habitually resident in the State and are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care. Full-time care and attention is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The person concerned is in receipt of CA since 22 January 2012. An application in respect of a second care recipient was received from her on 30 November 2017. The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that the evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied in respect of the second care recipient.

The person concerned was notified on 24 April 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

To date no request for review or appeal has been received by my Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Applications

248. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the claim for a working family payment by a person (details supplied); when a decision will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21779/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for Working Family Payment (WFP) was received from the person concerned on 30 April 2018. At the time of application, the person concerned was in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (JA) which is not payable with WFP. This customer's JA was closed on 16 May 2018 so WFP has been awarded and will be paid to their bank account on 18 May 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Insolvency Payments Scheme Payments

249. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the review of eligibility for the insolvency payments scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21837/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the insolvency payments scheme, which operates under the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act, 1984, which, in turn, derives from EU Council Directive 987/80, is to protect certain outstanding pay-related entitlements due to employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

Where a person's former employer was a limited company, the company must be in liquidation or receivership in order for the person to be eligible to claim under the insolvency payments scheme. In such circumstances, the liquidator or receiver becomes the relevant officer for submitting claims as he or she has access to the company records and can certify that the amounts claimed are in order.

There can be situations whereby employers have ceased trading without engaging in any formal wind-up process and some or all of their former employees are left with money owed to them. Such people are not covered by the insolvency payments scheme.

The Department is continuing to review the position to establish what, if anything, can be done to progress payments to individuals in situations where employers cease trading without engaging in a formal winding-up process and owe moneys to their employees. The Department is consulting a range of interested parties, including the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Revenue Commissioners, in respect of these issues.

In this regard, it is important to note that there are very difficult legal issues arising in insolvency law and the potential impacts that any proposed policy development might have on company law generally have to be considered.

I am not in a position to indicate at this stage when the review will be completed as there are

still some legal cases before the courts.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Delays

250. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are waiting approximately 19 weeks for a decision to be made on their carer's allowance application; her target time for decisions on applications for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21856/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

The target processing time for the carer's allowance scheme is to award 70% of new claims within 12 weeks. This can be challenging because of the complexities of the application process and the amount of information needed. However my Department recognises that the current wait time must be improved and is working to achieve this. At the end of April 2018 the average waiting time for new carer's allowance (CA) applications was 18 weeks which was an improvement on the March figure of 19 weeks.

The number of applications for CA has increased by 26% since 2015.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to carer's allowance, evidence must be provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides and the carer's means.

Staff resources have been re-assigned within the CA area to work on claims processing and a redesigned application form will be available shortly. This new form will allow carers to provide more information on the type and level of care they provide, with an aim to providing Deciding Officers with the information they need to expedite decisions on entitlement.

I expect the processing times in the carer's allowance area to show improvement over the coming months as a result of these changes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Applications

251. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue in respect of an application by a person (details supplied) for family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21859/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP), formerly known as Family Income Supplement, is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. WFP is paid for fifty-two weeks and a person must re-apply at the end of each fifty-two week period to have their payment renewed. The Working Family Payment of the person

concerned is due for renewal on 14th June 2018 when her weekly payment will increase to €65 per week. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Legislation

252. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if concerns outlined in correspondence from a person (details attached) in respect of pensions will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21862/18]

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 pension scheme in question 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.

Bereavement Leave

253. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for statutory bereavement leave; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21904/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is no statutory entitlement to bereavement leave in Irish legislation. Bereavement leave is normally granted at the discretion of the employer.

My colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality has policy responsibility for maternity leave, parental leave, carer's leave, and force majeure leave. So the issue of bereavement leave would fall within this category of compassionate leave.

I understand that officials at the Department of Justice and Equality are currently working on a Family Leave Bill which will consolidate into one piece of legislation the current provisions regarding maternity, adoptive, parental and carer's leave. However, I understand that there are no proposals to include Bereavement Leave in this Bill.

Widow's Pension Eligibility

254. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the action she will take in view of the decision in the case of a person (details supplied); when the widow's pension might be restored in view of the prospect of legal action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21918/18]

255. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the action she will take in view of the decision in the case of a person (details supplied) who has been accused of cohabiting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21920/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 255 together.

To qualify for a Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Non Contributory Pension, the applicant must be a widow, widower or a surviving civil partner, who is not involved in a cohabiting relationship. In the course of review and investigation of the continued eligibility for this pension, the customer herself advised the inspector that she was in a cohabiting relationship since August 2017 and signed a voluntary declaration to this effect.

As a result the applicant was advised of the decision to terminate her Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Non Contributory Pension due to the fact she was cohabiting. I

note that the Deputy subsequently appealed this decision on behalf of the customer to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The Social Welfare Appeals Officer concluded that cohabitation existed and disallowed the appeal. The applicant was advised of this decision on 27 April 2018.

The Social Welfare Appeals system is underpinned by Chapter 2 of Part 10 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 and the Social Welfare (Appeals) Regulations 1998 (SI 108/98). This legislation sets down the roles, powers, functions etc. of the Social Welfare Appeals Office and its Appeals Officers. Appeals Officers and the Social Welfare Appeals Office are required to operate within the powers and boundaries set down in this legislation.

Under the legislation, the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed under Section 317 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

The Chief Appeals Officer has power under Section 318 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 to revise any decision where it appears to her that the Appeals Officer's decision was erroneous by reason of some mistake having been made in relation to the law or the facts. A request for such a review by the Chief Appeals Officer may be made by writing to her at the Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2. If the person concerned decides to take this course of action, it will be necessary for the person to set down specifically the reasons why they believe the Appeals Officer's decision to be incorrect having regard to his or her interpretation or application of the law or the facts.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 255 answered with Question No. 254.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

256. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in regard to rent support in the case of persons (details supplied); if the issue regarding the level of rent support has been resolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21941/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rental property of the persons concerned is in an area designated as a Rental Pressure Zone. Rents for properties in a Rental Pressure Zone, are only permitted to rise according to a prescribed formula by a maximum of 4% annually. The persons concerned informed my Department that their rent had been increased to €1300 per calendar from 1 December 2017 which is in excess of the 4% permitted as the rent had most recently been increased to €1125 per calendar month on 30 October 2014. As the maximum increased rent allowable would be €1194.38, my Department is unable to grant an increase in Rent Supplement for a rent increased in excess of this amount.

The persons concerned have been asked to provide a lease agreement and a completed Rent Supplement application form which confirms a rent being charged which does not exceed the permitted rate outlined above. On receipt of this documentation, the rate of Rent Supplement payable can be re-assessed. In the interim Rent Supplement will continue to be paid at the current approved rate.

The persons concerned have been advised to make contact with the Residential Tenancies Board to get further information regarding their rights as tenants.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a one-parent family allowance and child benefit will be paid in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21945/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned had a claim for child benefit disallowed on 3 May on the grounds that she is not considered habitually resident in the State. As she is awaiting a decision from the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service regarding her permission to reside in the State she cannot be regarded as habitually resident.

Subsection (5) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended, explicitly states that a person who does not have a right to reside in the State cannot be habitually resident for social welfare purposes.

It should be noted that there is no record in the Department that the person concerned has lodged a claim for one parent family payment at this time.

I trust this clarifies the position for the deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

258. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the provision that can be made to alleviate hardship in the case of a person (details supplied) whose social welfare payment has been terminated and who is as a result suffering hardship; if the case can be urgently reviewed with a view to reinstatement of payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21947/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned failed to attend appointments with the JobPath Provider and regretfully his Jobseekers Allowance payment was reduced as a consequence of his non-engagement.

However, the person concerned re-engaged on 8 May 2018 and full payment to Jobseekers Allowance has been restored and all monies due have issued.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

259. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the implications for pension policy and future pension provision in the private sector of the unilateral decision by a company (details supplied) to close its defined benefit scheme. [21301/18]

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 pension scheme in question and plans to close the scheme to future accrual. Neither I nor the Pensions Authority has the power under legislation to in-

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.

Local Authority Housing Funding

260. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the extent to which his Department can offer further latitude for immediate expenditure by the various local authorities on measures to address the housing crisis by way of direct build; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21928/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities now have substantial pipelines of approved new social housing construction projects, details can be seen in the quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Reports published by my Department. The most recently available report sets out the position as at end quarter 4 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/>.

I am keen that local authorities advance all projects as speedily as possible and the funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard. For example, to support the expansion of local authority social housing build and acquisitions programme, the funding available for 2018 has increased by over 43% compared with 2017 expenditure, with a funding provision of €639 million available this year.

Overall, the funding investment to support the implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is over €6 billion with a total funding provision of €1.9 billion available to meet the housing needs of almost 25,500 households this year – this represents an increase of 36% over 2017 expenditure. The capital provision is €1.14 billion, to support the delivery of almost 5,900 new social homes through construction/refurbishment and acquisition of houses and apartments by local authorities and approved housing bodies this year.

My Department will continue to work closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of their construction programme, including through turnkey and rapid build initiatives.

Planning Guidelines

261. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions taken in each of the years 2015 to 2017, and to date in 2018, to ensure Ireland has a planning system that is fit for purpose for data centre investment projects in view of confirmation that a company (details supplied) will not proceed with a data centre investment in Athenry, County Galway and delays in the planning approval process [21971/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer the Deputy to my reply to his Question No. 338 of 19 April 2018. The position is unchanged.

Housing Data

262. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland loans that have been approved and drawn down nationally; the number of such loans that have been applied for in County Louth; the number of such loans that have been approved and or drawn down in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21759/18]

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: 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.

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 loan offers should be made to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures of the numbers of applications that it has assessed on a national basis. To the end of April, it had received a total of 660 valid applications for assessment from local authorities. Of these, 479 had been assessed, of which 46% of these were 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 any other relevant factors.

Commemorative Medals

263. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if 1916 medals will be presented to those in the Fire Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21762/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of fire services in local authority areas is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy and through a range of service development programmes.

The issuing of 1916 - 2016 commemorative medals was a commitment in 'A Programme for Partnership Government' for the Defence Forces, and therefore did not include staff in local authority Fire Services.

However, my Department is commissioning medals in recognition of the role played by staff working in the Fire Services in relation to the 1916 commemorations. It is envisaged that all Fire Services staff serving in April 2016 will be eligible to receive the medal.

A tender process is being undertaken as part of procurement and my Department will be in contact with all fire authorities in relation to this matter in the coming weeks.

Rental Sector

264. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if receivers are bound by the Tyrrellstown Amendment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21784/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Sections 38 to 40 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 amend the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to provide, *inter alia*, that, where a landlord proposes to sell 10 or more units within a single development at the same time (i.e. defined as within a 6-month period), the sale will be subject to the existing tenants remaining *in situ*, other than in exceptional circumstances. The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 defines a landlord as the person for the time being entitled to receive (otherwise than as agent for another person) the rent paid in respect of a dwelling by the tenant thereof.

The appointment of a receiver to a dwelling can cause confusion and distress to tenants and, in circumstances where a receiver is appointed to a rented dwelling, it is essential that the rights of tenants are protected. Under Action 5 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department has established a working group with the participation of the Departments of Justice and Equality; Finance; and Business, Enterprise & Innovation, to examine the scope for amending legislation to provide for greater protection of tenants' rights during the receivership process.

The objective is to protect the rights of tenants during the receivership process by ensuring that persons appointed as receivers will be required to fulfil the obligations of a landlord. To inform its work, the Working Group has sought legal opinion on the feasibility of amending legislation to provide greater protection of tenants' rights during the receivership process. I understand that the Working Group expects to finalise its report shortly, and I will consider its analysis and findings in identifying the appropriate next steps.

Advertising Regulation

265. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to curb the practice of developers advertising residential units as price on application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21800/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Questions Nos. 594 and 599 of 15 May 2018 which sets out the position in relation to this matter.

Departmental Communications

266. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the complaints made to media organisations, voluntary sector organisations or other organisations or persons regarding unfavourable or critical comment or coverage since he was appointed in tabular form. [21812/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): No complaints have been made by me or my Department to media organisations, voluntary sector organisations or other organisations or persons regarding unfavourable or critical comment or coverage since my appointment.

On occasion, should factually incorrect or inaccurate material be published, my Department may contact the organisation concerned bringing the relevant inaccuracy to their attention and requesting that it be amended to reflect the true position.

Ministerial Meetings

267. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the meetings held between him, his Departmental officials and a company (details supplied) regarding its affordable housing proposal; if details of proposals made directly to him regarding the delivery of affordable housing will be published; and the subsidies requested by or offered to the company, for example, State land, access to CALF and so on. [21813/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I met with the company concerned in July 2017 and my Department has met with them on a number of occasions since. In addition, my Department received a submission from the company in the context of the review of Rebuilding Ireland.

My Department will be meeting the company again in the coming weeks, together with representatives from other bodies associated with their proposal regarding the delivery of affordable housing. After this meeting, my Department will be better placed to analyse and assess the proposal and identify the next steps to be taken, where appropriate, for my consideration and decision.

Homeless Persons Data

268. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities whose initial homeless figures for March 2018 were amended; the number of families removed from the initial figures; the number of adults and children included in these families; and the type of temporary or permanent accommodation arrangements for the families by each local authority in tabular form. [21814/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 miscategorised 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. A total of 247 adults and 331 children were removed from the report with the agreement of the relevant authorities. My Department does not have details of the numbers of families involved. In the case of Louth and Dublin, the accommodation consisted of private houses/apartments rented by the local authorities; in the case of Waterford, Limerick and Kerry, the accommodation involved was local authority housing.

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.

Mortgage Insurance

269. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason applicants for local authority mortgage loans source their own mortgage protection insurance in view of the fact that this adds unnecessary expense to an applicants mortgage (details supplied). [21842/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 and is designed to provide an appropriate level of insurance cover to those who wish to avail of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. It is overseen by the Mortgage Protection Insurance Committee, a sub-committee of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) with representatives from the CCMA, local authorities and the Housing Finance Agency, as well as my Department.

The local authority MPI 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.

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.

Regarding the information available to prospective applicants on the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website, I am aware of previous issues concerning the inclusion of the cost of MPI in the on-line calculator. This has recently been amended in order to take the cost of mortgage protection insurance into account, and will therefore give potential applicants a clearer indication of the amount that they could be eligible to borrow under the scheme.

National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability Strategy

270. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units under the national housing strategy for persons with a disability delivered during the period 2015 to 2017 in the four Dublin counties and nationally. [21854/18]

271. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units under the national disability inclusion strategy which will be delivered by Rebuilding Ireland in 2018 to 2021. [21855/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 and 271 together.

Section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. The provision and allocation of social housing are matters for local authorities in accordance with their allocation scheme. Accordingly, my Department does not collect data from local authorities on their allocations to individual categories of applicant.

Planning authorities are however required, under section 94 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, to include a housing strategy in their development plans which must outline the authorities' plans for the existing and future housing needs of the population of their areas. The strategy must include provisions to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households including the special requirements of people with disabilities. Housing strategies must also have regard to relevant policies or objectives of the Government. In that context and building on the Programme for Partnership Government commitment to meet the housing needs of people with a disability, the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD) 2011-2016 was affirmed in Rebuilding Ireland and extended to 2020 to continue to deliver on its aims.

In accordance with the vision and strategic aims of the NHSPWD to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability at local level, Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) have been established in all local authority areas. These are chaired by the Directors of Housing with membership including the HSE and disability representatives. Each HDSG has prepared a local Strategic Plan for its own City/County area, to develop specific local strategies to meet the identified and emerging housing needs of people with disabilities in their areas with a view to developing annual targets for the delivery of housing to people with a disability on their housing waiting lists. All Plans are now operational in each local authority with the majority already published on the relevant local authority websites. These Plans, along with the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), will allow local authorities to plan more strategically for the housing needs of people with a disability and will support the delivery of accommodation using all appropriate housing mechanisms. I have instructed all local authorities to be cognisant of the needs identified under the SSHA process as they work on delivery to meet the targets set for them by my Department over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland.

Rebuilding Ireland contains specific commitments to meet the housing needs of the vulnerable in our society. The needs of people with disabilities and older people are specifically addressed through targeted funding such as the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). This scheme provides funding of up to 100% of project costs advanced by local authorities to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to provide accommodation for specific categories of people, including people with a disability. A provision of €88.8 million is available for the scheme this year. My Department also provides funding for necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works to the houses of people with disabilities and older people in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs, and to facilitate the continued occupancy of their own home for as long as possible. Rebuilding Ireland has committed to increasing the funding available for these grants and funding has increased year on year since 2014. A total of €66.25 million is available for these schemes in 2018, comprising €53 million exchequer funding, which is an increase of 11% on the 2017 figure, with the balance of €13.25 million coming from local authority resources. Further consideration will be given to increasing this funding over the coming years. In addition, under the Disabled Persons Grants (DPG) scheme, funding is provided to local authorities for adaptations and extensions to the existing social housing stock to meet the needs of older local authority tenants and people with a disability. In 2017 funding of €13.1 million was recouped to local authorities supporting improvements in over 1,300 homes. Local authorities have recently submitted details of their work proposals and related funding require-

ments for this scheme in 2018. These are currently being assessed and funding allocations will be notified to local authorities shortly.

The supports put in place since the launch of the NHSPWD in 2011, together with the commitments and substantial funding provided by my Department under Rebuilding Ireland, point to continuing tangible progress being made in respect of housing for people with disabilities and accord with the Programme for Government commitment to improve the lives of people with a disability.

Approved Housing Bodies

272. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his Department's steps to address the classification of approved housing bodies as part of general Government expenditure; the timeframe for actions to be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21896/18]

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 for Housing and Homelessness. 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 has engaged its 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.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

273. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units covered by the enhanced leasing scheme by county; the anticipated costs in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21897/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A range of housing options are necessary to ensure a supply of accommodation to meet different types of social housing need. Harnessing the off-balance sheet potential of private investment in social housing is an important objective of the Government and the social housing targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland over the period to 2021 reflect the ambition in that regard.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, 10,000 are targeted to be leased by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) under leas-

ing arrangements from a range of different sources, including 3,500 homes targeted using the Repair and Lease Scheme (RLS), and 6,500 homes using a combination of the existing social housing leasing arrangements, and the new Enhanced Lease Scheme. All homes delivered under leasing arrangements, including a new Enhanced Leasing Scheme, will be funded under the Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).

It is intended that up to 2,000 units will be leased by Local Authorities in 2018 through a combination of the existing Long Term Leasing arrangements, the Repair and Leasing Scheme and the new Enhanced Leasing Scheme.

The new Enhanced Leasing Scheme has been developed by my Department, together with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the Housing Agency and local authorities, in order to harness the potential of private sector interest in social housing delivery in a new set of long-term leasing arrangements, in a manner designed to leverage off-balance sheet funding opportunities in accordance with Rebuilding Ireland objectives.

The new Scheme is targeted at new build or new to the market properties to be delivered at scale and will complement the existing long-term leasing arrangements, which will continue to be available. There are, however, a number of key differences between the existing long term lease and the enhanced lease, the purpose of which is to facilitate larger levels of private investment in social housing while ensuring that the capital investment is off balance sheet in respect of Government expenditure.

The scheme will be governed by my Department and operated by local authorities. The Housing Agency will manage and administer the scheme on behalf of my Department and will act as a national co-ordinator.

A call for proposals was launched on 31 January 2018 and the Housing Agency accepted submissions from interested parties until 12 April 2018. All proposals are subject to a range of criteria as set out in the "Calls for Proposals for Enhanced Long Term Social Housing Leasing Scheme" and the proposals will be assessed and marked in accordance with the terms set out therein. The Call for Proposals is available on the Housing Agency website at the following link: www.housingagency.ie/News/Current-News/Enhanced-Long-Term-Social-Housing-Leasing-Scheme.aspx.

A total of 33 submissions were received from interested parties which represents strong interest from the market. The Housing Agency is currently reviewing the proposals and will complete the initial review process in the coming weeks. The total number of units proposed is still being worked through as part of the assessment process and will be the subject of an agreement between the individual Local Authorities and proposers.

Further information with respect to the numbers and locations of the units proposed for leasing under the Scheme will only be available once the individual proposals have been assessed, marked and accepted in accordance with the terms and methodology set out in the Calls for Proposals document.

European Parliament Membership

274. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to initiate a boundary commission on European Parliament boundaries in view of a recent parliament decision to extend the number of MEP seats here from 11 to 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21898/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The composition of the current 2014-2019 European Parliament was established by European Council Decision 2013/312/EU of 28 June 2013 which, in the case of Ireland, provided for the election of 11 MEPs. The current number of MEPs in the European Parliament is 750 plus the President with each Member State having between 6 and 96 Members.

Council Decision 2013/312/EU provided that it would be revised again in advance of the 2019-2024 parliamentary term upon an initiative of the European Parliament to be presented to the European Council before the end of 2016. The launch of this process was, however, postponed by the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (i.e. the AFCO Committee) until after the referendum in the United Kingdom on its withdrawal from the European Union.

Following a report in the matter by the AFCO Committee, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 7 February 2018 which contains a Proposal for a Decision of the European Council establishing the composition of the European Parliament. In broad terms, the proposal provides, among other things, that:

when the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union becomes legally effective, 27 of the United Kingdom's 73 seats would be re-distributed among 14 Member States, of which 2 would go to Ireland, increasing Ireland's MEPs from 11 to 13 in number. This would mean a reduction in the overall size of the European Parliament from 751 to 705 members;

- however, as set out in the Parliament's resolution, if the date on which the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union becomes legally effective takes place after the European Parliament elections are held in mid-2019, the number of MEPs to be elected from each Member State for the 2019-2024 parliamentary term would remain the same as that of the current parliament. The additional seats would only be filled on the date after which the United Kingdom's withdrawal becomes legally effective.

The proposal, which will require unanimity, is now under consideration within the European Council; the consent of the Parliament will be sought by the Council by way of written procedure. Subject to the consent of the European Parliament, it is anticipated that the proposal will be adopted by the European Council at its meeting on 28 June 2018.

In the event that Ireland's total number of seats in the European Parliament is changed in respect of the 2019-2024 parliamentary term, it will be necessary to review our European constituency arrangements. Under section 5(1A) of the Electoral Act 1997, provision is made for the establishment of a Constituency Commission in such circumstances to review, and report with recommendations on, European Parliament constituencies. This was done in 2013 prior to the last elections to the European Parliament.

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275. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated number of units provided through the repair and lease scheme in 2018; the number provided in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21901/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant dwellings across Ireland. The RLS was established on a

pilot basis in Waterford and Carlow local authorities in October 2016 and expanded nationwide from 23 February 2017.

The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant dwellings, who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their dwellings up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the dwelling for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met up-front by the local authority or an approved housing body (AHB).

At the end of 2017, a total of 820 applications had been received under the scheme. Local authorities were engaging with the property owners in relation to 573 properties, 31 agreements for lease had been signed and 9 homes had been delivered and tenanted. A detailed breakdown of the RLS scheme data up to end Q4 2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision.

It is clear from the end 2017 output that RLS has not yet delivered the level of new social housing homes envisaged. I have reviewed the operation of the scheme, as part of the review of Rebuilding Ireland, and I have concluded that the scheme has significant potential but there are areas where it can be improved to make it more attractive and effective. At the second Housing Summit held on 22 January 2018, I announced a number of key changes to the scheme which took effect from 1 February 2018. These include:

- a reduction in the minimum lease term required from 10 to 5 years;
- an increase in the proportion of market rent available to property owners where they take on more responsibilities under the tenancy, meaning that up to 92% of market rent will be available; and
- provision of additional funding for property owners, over and above the current €40,000 limit, where the dwelling is a bedsit type dwelling being brought into compliance with the Standards for Rented Houses Regulations and made available for social housing.

I am making €32 million available for the scheme in 2018 and I expect local authorities and AHBs to continue to implement the scheme locally.

Over the period 2016 to 2021, the national target is for the delivery of an additional 50,000 social housing homes through Build, Acquisition and Leasing Schemes. The ambition is for 33,500 of these homes to be delivered through new build programmes including Part V; for 6,500 to be delivered through Acquisition programmes including the Housing Agency Acquisition Programme; and for the remaining 10,000 homes to be delivered under a range of leasing initiatives including the RLS. Out of the total 10,000 homes to be delivered under Leasing, it is expected that 2,000 will be leased by local authorities in 2018 under a range of leasing initiatives, including the Repair and Leasing Scheme, long term leasing and the new Enhanced Lease.

I wrote to all Local Authorities on 18 April 2018 setting out their social housing delivery targets for Build, Acquisition and Leasing for 2018, and for the period 2018-2021. The targets are published 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/>.

Commercial Rates Yield

276. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an analysis was carried out by his Department or the local authority concerned on the potential revenue raised by commercial rates if a project (details supplied) in County Galway had been completed; and the value of such estimates over a calendar year. [21973/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The Commissioner of Valuation has responsibility for valuation matters and is independent in the performance of his functions under the Acts. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority.

No analysis was carried out by my Department in relation to possible rates income to Galway County Council from the project in question. Any possible analysis carried out by Galway County Council would be a matter for that local authority.

Wildlife Protection

277. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the involvement of the Defence Forces in a pilot training scheme in conjunction with An Garda Síochána and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to combat wildlife crime will be considered. [20409/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department investigate breaches of both the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 to 2015. Members of An Garda Síochána are also empowered under the Wildlife Acts and European Communities Regulations to investigate alleged offences and to prosecute if they see fit.

Of my Department's total staff, I understand that some 330 work in the area of natural heritage through the NPWS of my Department. In addition, my Department takes on in the region of 70 seasonal staff during the year to assist the NPWS. Frontline conservation Rangers are deployed through a regional structure and assignments are determined in light of Departmental business needs and priorities.

Within this staffing context, officials of my Department carry out scientific research, survey work and monitor compliance with national and European law in relation to nature conservation across the country. They conduct patrols and site visits to enforce the various provisions of national and EU legislation, as required, and many of these officers carry out work in more than one county. They also investigate reports of breaches of legislation including illegal snaring of badgers, hare lurching as well monitoring compliance at coursing events etc. Staffing levels across my Department are kept under regular review in line with emerging business needs and Government policy on public sector pay and staffing as advised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

It should also be noted that the Department of Defence already assists my Department in the provision of aerial monitoring of certain sites and habitats and my Department will continue to liaise with that Department in providing assistance in investigating breaches of wildlife legisla-

tion.

I would point out that since 2015 my Department has brought over 50 separate prosecutions for breaches of wildlife legislation. These prosecutions have include illegal badger baiting, hare lurching, deer hunting, poisoning and shooting of endangered bird species as well as illegally cutting hedges and burning vegetation. My Department will continue our covert actions with other agencies, including An Garda Síochána and the I.S.P.C.A to counteract all illegal activities.